

Is this really want you wanted?

notsosureabthis

Yellowjackets (TV)

Complete



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Summary

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Description:

No plane crash, no pregnancy. Slow burn JackieShauna from Jackie's POV with a lot of fighting and a lot of pining. At least no one dies! Jackie knows she's a lesbian, and Shauna does nothing but confuse her. What happens when everything blows up and there's no wilderness to hide in? Same storyline as you are all i have ever wanted but from Jackie's POV.

Chapter 1

They lost. They made it all the way to nationals, just to choke in the last 10 minutes. Up by 2 the entire game, and then gave it away. Jackie was devastated, she felt this loss more than anyone else. As team captain, their collapse at the end of the game is a direct reflection of her. She might not have made the errors, but she was responsible for maintaining the team's focus, and she failed. The plane ride home was dead silent. She sat next to Shauna, as always, who offered the comfort of a hand on her thigh, but there was nothing for any of them to say. Even Tai's post game crash out was short lived. There was no one person to blame, making it hard for any of them to really lash out at anyone.

Jackie knew it was a good season, she knew that they should be proud of it, but it just hurt to know you had the game won and threw it all away. The helpless feeling of watching everyone collapse around you when there is nothing she could do to stop it will haunt her. Everyone seemed to be asleep on the plane, but she couldn't, only thinking about how THAT was the last game she would ever play. She's graduating, this game was her last chance to leave her mark on the program, and honestly it's embarrassing to have failed like that, in that way. Still, thinking about the loss is better than thinking about what's waiting for her at home. Fucking Jeff, who will now find a way to see the girl's soccer team on the same level as the mediocre fucking baseball team. And she'll smile, and drink, and laugh, and drink. God she hates him. If only she didn't need him. Really, it could be worse. He doesn't expect her to sleep with him, and Jackie can pretend to be interested in waiting for the 'right time', like that will ever happen with him. If her parents, or the school, ever found out that Jackie's rewatches of *Pretty Woman* had a lot more to do with Julia Roberts than Richard Gere, her entire life would be over. So, she'll go to Lottie's house and party tonight, making him drive her and Shauna and get herself drunk enough to not puke on his dick when he begs her to get him off.

Van had insisted that Lottie let her throw a party at her mansion regardless of a win or a loss, saying they were going to either need a celebration or to drown their sorrows. Lottie agreed of course, Jackie knew she would do anything for the soccer girls, and she didn't care who all was at her house, Lottie would probably spend it in her bedroom or her vacant basement with whoever felt chill enough to hang out with for the night. She was never big into the parties, but she never said no to hosting them. She'd always tell them, 'Somebody should be able to enjoy that big empty house'. It was hard for anyone to really argue with that. Shauna snored quietly, and her head dropped on Jackie's shoulder. Jackie smiled, and leaned into the touch. It was the most comforting thing she could have asked for in that moment, and it cleared her mind entirely. She was finally able to drift off next to her for the rest of the flight.

When the plane landed, Shauna had to wake her up. She must have been more exhausted than she thought. She got her bag and Shauna's too, grabbing for her hand to lead them both off the plane, when Shauna snapped with a mumbled, "I can get my own fucking bag Jackie." She grabbed it from her and walked off the plane. Jackie assumed it was just stress about the game, but it still stung. She could be so sweet sometimes, and she knew Jackie better than

anybody ever would be able to, but recently, it's started to feel like Shauna didn't even like her.

After 15 years of friendship, Shauna seemed like she had no interest in it at times, and it hurt more than Jackie would like to admit. She followed her, too in her own head to even respond. The rest of the team didn't even react, it wasn't even out of the ordinary for anyone anymore. That was kind of depressing.

Shauna was waiting in the car for Jackie, who put her bag in the back and sat in her rightful place in her passenger seat. "Why don't we go through McDonald's on the way, maybe it'll cheer you up?" Shauna sighed, clearly irritated, but just put the car in drive and started moving.

"Shauna, what's wrong? I know the game sucked, but snapping at me every 3 seconds isn't helping anything." Jackie watched her physically pause, take a deep breath, and then put on this smile that's so unlike her it made Jackie sick.

"Yeah, sure Jax I can drive through." Jackie didn't even know what to say to that, so she gave Shauna a tight lipped smile and leaned back into the headrest and closed her eyes. She could hear Shauna sigh and decided to let the dead air rest between them. It didn't take long for Shauna to crack. "Hey, Jackie, look I'm sorry. I didn't mean to snap at you, it's just the game. You're right, some food will make me feel better. Thank you for thinking of it." Jackie smiled, a real one this time because it is actually impossible for her to ever really be upset with Shauna fucking Shipman.

She allowed herself to look at her... like really look at her, now that her eyes were trained on the road. She's so fucking beautiful. It took everything in her power not to drop her eyes to Shauna's lips, so she reached into Shauna's backseat and grabbed her magazine. "Obviously, babe, that's what best friends are for."

The rest of the ride, Shauna was her usual self, a little dark, but what's new honestly? They laughed, they joked, they complained. Jackie mentioned Lottie's party, and Shauna's face fell just for a second.

"What was that?"

"What was what?" Shauna didn't look at her. Now apparently worried about road safety.

"Your face Shauna. Do you not want to go?" Panic started to set in. Losing the game was one thing, having to go home to Jeff after sharing a hotel room with Shauna for 3 days was one thing, these were things she could handle, but the loneliness that starts to set in when Jackie has been drinking and can't feel Shauna close to her, that doesn't even compare. When Jackie's been drinking things start to become a little too clear, the understanding that she can never be happy, never have that rom com life she's always dreamed of, gets brought to the forefront of her mind. Without Shauna, she will at best feel dull, a feeling that is absolutely nonexistent when she's around her. Regardless of whether Jackie liked it or not, Shauna was always gonna make her feel something. So, Shauna had to go. It couldn't be up for discussion.

"Jackie we just lost nationals, I just don't feel like being at a party where your lame ass boyfriend and Randy fucking Walsh try to tell me we 'tried our best'. Like I might actually get physically violent."

Jackie rolled her eyes. She knew Shauna was being honest. She had definitely been violent before, but not in years. She might have been mentioning a real concern, but she was still being dramatic. “You’re going Shauna. The whole team is going. You have to go. We can hang out, you and me. I’ll make sure my lame ass boyfriend doesn’t say anything to you,” Jackie said with a huff, annoyed that Shauna didn’t want to spend the night with her, annoyed that Shauna didn’t like Jeff, even though Jackie was constantly making sure he’s nice to her, driving her around, making sure he never got drunk and enjoyed himself at a party so that Shauna could. All that effort, all those fights with Jeff about it, just for her to be ungrateful and fucking hate him anyways.

Shauna rolled her eyes, “He’s not actually lame Jackie, I’m sorry.” And just like that, Jackie was over it. This just couldn’t be healthy, the way that Jackie just forgave and got over all these little jabs like they never happened. Shauna just had to exist and Jackie would forgive her for anything.

“No, he’s a little bit lame,” Jackie said with a laugh, “but please, you HAVE to go.”

“Yeah Jackie, I’m aware,” she snapped back. Her heart stopped racing quite as fast, and Shauna’s snippy remark didn’t even register over the relief that Jackie wouldn’t have to feel so alone tonight. She’s going, she will be there to get drunk with and Jackie will probably avoid her all night in an attempt to stop herself from making it painfully obvious she wants to pull her into the bathroom and kiss those beautifully full lips, feel on her hips and her toned thighs and her pretty little neck. Fuck, she was staring. Okay, moving on.

She knows it’s selfish, constantly ditching her at these parties, but what is she supposed to do? The only thing she can think to do in those situations is exactly the opposite of what she wants. Instead of making the move she wants to, she sits on Jeff’s lap, letting him kiss her neck, letting him drag her back to his truck to touch her. Picturing Shauna the whole time.

They pulled into Jackie’s driveway, “I’m coming over at 7 to get ready.”

“See you then, Jax. Love you.” Jackie shut the door, smiled and waved goodbye before disappearing through her front door. She felt a little guilty for never saying it back, but she was just so scared that if she said it out loud Shauna would see her for what she really was. Jackie couldn’t risk losing Shauna. Her parents weren’t home, never really were, so she went straight to the shower to think a little more intimately about Shauna’s lips.

Chapter 2

She got to Shauna's at 7:15, taking too long to look perfect before being seen by her. She's not sure why she still bothers, it will never happen. But when the girl she's been in love with her whole life looks at her, she wants her to think about how good she looks, even if it's not in a romantic or sexual way. She doesn't bother knocking and walks straight up, heading straight to the attic that doubles as Shauna's bedroom. She's turned away from her, and doesn't notice her right away. Jackie cherishes opportunities like this, to look at Shauna however she wants without any devastating repercussions. She's got a couple outfits laid out, in her frilly bralette and their practice shorts. The fabric always hugs all the right places on her thighs, but it's time to snap out of it. "Trying outfits on without me, Shipman?" She jumps and turns around startled, which makes Jackie feel like a bit of a pervert, but she shakes the feeling away.

"You know I do actually dress myself every day, right?"

Jackie laughed, "You can't wear a flannel to the party Shauna, regardless of how good you might make it look." Shauna rolls her eyes and holds up a shirt, asking for Jackie's opinion. She sits down on Shauna's desk by the window, leans back on her arms, and shakes her head. Any boy at their high school would kill to see her positioned like this. She intentionally backlit herself, and she knows she looks fucking good. Not that it really matters anyway. Shauna threw the shirt aside and looked through her other options.

"Jeff called... he said that Randy asked about you today." Shauna didn't even look up, but she squinted and furrowed her eyebrows. Jackie can tell she's not interested, but the harder she pushes a boy onto Shauna, the less incriminating it will look when she inevitably stares a little too hard later tonight. Even better to offer up a boy who Shauna will never EVER go for. The thought of Shauna actually finding a nice boy, who she likes and who makes her smile and laugh, and who she's attracted to and can kiss or, oh god, even fuck, makes Jackie's stomach turn. So Randy is good. Randy is perfect. "He wanted to make sure you were coming tonight. I think he's interested." Shauna's head snapped to look at her and the sight of her brown eyes made Jackie freeze for a second, regardless of how angry they might be at the moment.

"Do you seriously think I am interested in Randy fucking Walsh? I understand that you and Jeff are this perfect couple, and I understand that you'd want to put me with somebody who fits into your double date mold, but fucking Randy?" Shauna seemed genuinely a little hurt, and her words were a little bit too true for Jackie's liking, so she was genuinely a little hurt too.

"Jesus Shauna just because he's interested doesn't mean I'm forcing you to fuck him, I just thought you'd want to know when someone asked about you." Not entirely dishonest.

"Well for future reference, not when it's Randy. He's the dumbest kid in our grade Jackie. It's a little insulting." So another guy and it would be okay for Jackie to force her to fuck him?

"So who would you be okay with me setting you up with?"

“What? No one Jackie, that’s not what I meant.”

“I don’t know if I believe you, do you have a crush on somebody?” Her heart ached but she said it teasingly, like a friend would.

“No. No, Jackie, we’re leaving in less than 6 months. Why would I get with anybody right now?”

“We can’t go to college virgins, Shauna.” She kind of tensed up, and she looked Jackie up and down before looking away quickly. Jackie could feel the color on her face and cleared her throat.

“So you and Jeff then?” She asked.

Jackie just shrugged. “It has to be someone, right? Aren’t you supposed to lose it to your high school sweetheart?” Shauna’s eyes hit the ground. She almost looked upset about it... Jackie couldn’t help herself but press it, filled with delusion “I don’t know, should I just do it tonight? Get it over with?”

Shauna seemed a little tense, but responded “Doesn’t that kind of defeat the whole purpose of wanting it to be special?”

“Well it’s Jeff, Shauna of course it would be special.” Shauna took her shorts off and started putting on a dress that Jackie had picked out for her at the mall a few weeks prior, and Jackie immediately realized just how much of a lie she just spoke. Fuck she is so hot. There goes Jackie’s eyes again, all over her body.

Jeff honking in the driveway snapped her out of it, “Could you help me zip this?” Jackie jumped up and helped her zip up her dress, avoiding Shauna’s body with her eyes but relishing in the closeness. They stood in the mirror together, ‘Your boobs look amazing in that,’ Jackie said to her. Shauna smiled softly, “You think?” Jackie looked away again.

“Yes babe. It’s working.” Shauna rolled her eyes and laughed a little before turning to walk out the door.

The party was the same as usual, the loss didn’t seem to stop anybody from having a good time. She spent essentially the whole party with Jeff’s arm around her. Shauna looked so fucking good in that dress that she really couldn’t risk being too close, regardless what she might have promised her earlier. She could tell it was hurting Shauna though, she kept downing more and more of her drink. Everytime Jackie saw her she had a different one. It made her sad, and even though Shauna would never be able to tell, she decided to keep up with her in solidarity. She might not be able to be a good enough friend to Shauna tonight, but drinking she could do.

The drunker she got, the more affectionate Jeff got, and Jackie, of course, couldn’t say no. All she could do was picture Shauna, going after the parts of Jeff that weren’t inherently male. She let his cold, rough hands feel her waist as they danced. She was just so sad. She buried her face into the side of his neck and tried to picture Shauna’s. She kissed it, soft, all the way from his ear down to his collarbone. His hands moved around to her ass and he picked her up. She wrapped her legs around him and she could tell this was probably mean. Getting him so worked up when she knew she wasn’t going to fuck him. She kept kissing and sucking on his neck until she felt his dick pressing into her thighs through his pants. It

fucking ruined it. She sighed and got off of him, noticing her lipstick glued to his neck. She looked around for Shauna and found her, eyes glued to the ground in the corner of the house.

Jeff looked at her, "Why don't we go to the truck for a while?" She was devastated. All she could do was nod and follow him out of the house. She saw Shauna's eyes locked on them as they left. He wanted to fuck her, so she gave him a blowjob. It was the least she could do, honestly. She was making out with him like she wanted to eat him alive, but of course it wasn't ever really about him.

When they got back to the party, Shauna was nowhere to be found. Jeff went back with Randy and the baseball team, and Jackie went outside to look for her. She found her with fucking Natalie of all people, smoking a joint and laughing. She was too drunk to hide her jealousy and stormed up to them. "Shauna what the fuck are you doing?"

"Jesus Christ Jackie I'm smoking a little bit of weed, I'm not fucking hurting anyone," Shauna said, slurring every other word. The jealousy turned into fear and worry. Nat laughed and Jackie turned to scowl at her.

"She's fucking wasted Nat, you really think giving her weed is a good idea right now?" Nat didn't even answer, just shrugged, probably knowing this had less to do with her than Jackie was making it seem.

"Jackie! Fucking relax. Weren't you busy dry humping your boyfriend anyway? Why do you suddenly seem to give a fuck about what I'm doing." Nat laughed and Jackie actually flinched. It stung, it might not have if she had 4 or 5 less drinks, but that's not the situation they were in.

"Come on, Shauna, your ride is leaving." She turned around and started walking away, hearing Nat laugh again behind her. She knew Shauna would follow her. She always does. Jackie blinked the tears out of her eyes as she caught up. "You're fucking mean when you drink you know?" she said without offering her a glance. She can practically feel Shauna's eye roll as they walk in silence to go find Jeff.

Half way through the back door, Jackie feels like she needs to puke. This was all too much. Tonight was a fucking nightmare. She ran through the bathroom door and Shauna followed her, shutting it behind them. When she dropped to her knees, Shauna grabbed her hair and sat down behind her. "Just let it all out Jax, let it out," she said softly, lips touching her ear. Jackie shuddered, luckily disguised by the retching that followed. She's so drunk and feels like absolute shit. Between having to blow Jeff and finding Shauna laughing with Nat, this is fucking miserable, and now, Shauna is pressed up against her, her lips on her neck and wait. She kissed her. Shauna kissed the back of her neck. "Let it out Jackie, it's okay. You'll feel better after." Jesus fucking christ. Shauna didn't even realize what she had just done to Jackie. Realistically, it was no different than their not-so-unusual kiss on the cheek, but to Jackie, drunk Jackie at that, it was so much more. She immediately threw up again, quickly standing up without a word and walking out of the bathroom, escaping from a situation that now felt very dangerous.

By the time they got to the car the whole thing was essentially forgotten, at least on the surface. Jackie told Jeff to drop her off first, because the confusion of being in the car with both Jeff and Shauna was actually making her physically ill. Any kind of closeness or alone time with Jeff would definitely do it, and any thoughts of how good Shauna looked in that

dress or the feeling of her lips on the back of her neck would probably make her cry. When they got to her house, Jeff smiled and got out to open the car door for her, walking her to the door like a good guy would. In another world, Jackie is more grateful, but now she just wants to be rid of him. She made it inside and quietly shut the door behind her. Too drunk to even bother with a shower. She laid in bed and before she could really even fathom why, she just started to cry.

Chapter 3

Jackie woke up the next morning with a raging fucking headache. She immediately sprinted to the bathroom and puked up every ounce of the alcohol she drank last night. How the fuck does Shauna do this so often? She calls Jeff and invites him over for breakfast with her parents, a Saturday tradition. They adore Jeff, probably like him more than they do Jackie, yet another reason why he's perfect for her. If only she could just start actually liking him. She lays out a cute sweater with a skirt and gets in the shower to reset and wash away her hangover.

Breakfast goes well, she doesn't say much, Jeff talks about how badly he wants to go to Rutgers with Jackie, but he feels that he has to follow his dreams to play professional baseball, and go to the local community college with hopes of being recruited from there. Jackie suppressed a laugh at the thought with a mouthful of eggs.

After breakfast, or really brunch at this point, Jeff follows Jackie up to her room. He sits on her bed and pulls her over to him with his hand on her hip. She looks at him and smiles, he does have a pretty face to look at, and he's so kind and honest, she felt bad for him that he had to fall into Jackie's life in this way. She climbed on his lap and he smiled back.

"You really are so beautiful Jackie. I am so lucky to have you." Jackie kissed him so she doesn't have to respond, because he is anything but lucky. He kisses her like he's hungry, and Jackie wishes she could feel that way. She wants to feel that way so badly, but she just can't force herself to. She put her hands behind his neck and pretended. She does everything she can to feel Shauna instead, her lips on the back of her neck, her breathing in her ear, and the taste of her chapstick. He grabs her hips forcefully, grinding into her, and she can feel his hard on through his khaki pants. Even if she doesn't want him, it feels really nice to be wanted like that. For someone to be this desperate for her. Maybe she could learn to love him for that, it wasn't going to come in any other form, but Jackie could learn to love the attention he gives her. She grabbed one of his hands and moved it under her shirt. "Fuck, Jackie, I want you so bad."

"I know baby, I know." He grips her nipple between his fingers and squeezes, it's not exactly arousing, but Jackie knew he was getting off on it and she needed this to be over sooner rather than later.

"Please baby, I'm so hard. I want to feel it inside you." Jackie froze. She should just say yes. She should let him fuck her and get it over with, but if she does it once, she'll be expected to do it over and over again, a lesson she learned after the first blowjob she gave him. She knew what he meant, but dropped to her knees anyway. He could've meant her mouth, right? She unzipped his pants and his dick practically exploded from it. She felt sick. At least this wouldn't take long. He moved it out of his boxers and she wrapped her lips around it. She knew how to make him cum, and was determined to make this quick. He lasted less than a minute. She brushed her teeth again and asked him to drive her over to Shauna's on his way home.

Shauna's house was quiet. It was like 2 pm at this point, her mom was probably working a 10 hour Saturday shift. Could Shauna really still be asleep? "Shauna? Anybody home?" Jackie asked loudly. All she heard was a groan coming from Shauna's room. She laughed and headed up the stairs to find her face down in her mattress, wearing nothing but that same bralette and a pair of underwear. The smile fell from her face for a second, she was more aroused by this 1 second sight of Shauna in nothing more exposing than a swimsuit would be than she was sucking her boyfriend's dick. Luckily, Shauna was hurting too badly to even open her eyes to notice.

"Oh, wowza, rough morning?" Jackie sat next to her on the bed. All she got in response was a long, drawn out ughhhhh. She laughed again, "Come on Shipman, it's 2pm, that hangover is not going to go away on its own." She moved Shauna's dark hair out of her face to reveal those lips, fucking again. Jesus christ this was getting unbearable. Her eyes opened, not helping the situation growing between Jackie's legs.

"Water." Her voice was raspy and deep, and so, so sexy. Jackie tried to play it off and laughed again, 'I will go get you some water, but you have to get out of bed when I get back.' Shauna moaned out an mhhmm. Jackie walked out of the room and took a deep breath. Fuck her whole life right now. She walked down the stairs and grabbed a glass out of the cabinet. She filled it up at the sink and grabbed two tylenol from the medicine cabinet before heading back up the stairs. Shauna was sitting up in bed, now, waiting for her to come back. The sight of Shauna sitting in bed like THAT, wearing nothing but her bra and waiting expectantly for Jackie to walk up the stairs was not helping her delusional tendencies. Her tits looked fucking phenomenal, something Jackie noticed even though she was trying her hardest not to look. She handed Shauna the water and the tylenol, instructing her to take sips and not chug, unless she wanted to end up bent over the toilet. Shauna looked her up and down and said, "Got it, mom. You look nice." Jackie tried not to blush.

"Yeah, I already puked up all my alcohol this morning."

That makes Shauna laugh. "Jackie Taylor, can't handle her liquor."

"Yeah yeah yeah, Shipman, at least I'm out of bed before 2."

"Touche." They laugh and Shauna gets out of bed, putting a pair of shorts and a big tshirt on.

"Is your mom working today?"

"Yeah, the 10 hour." Jackie nods.

"Can we just watch movies all day? I feel like garbage and really don't want to change or shower," Shauna asks her like there is anything else in this world that Jackie would want to do than cuddle up with her on the couch watching movies.

"Yes of course, babe, whatever you want." Shauna got dressed in day old clothes, and they walked downstairs. Jackie put the Pretty Woman tape in the VCR, something Shauna's mom hasn't had the time to replace with a DVD player yet, and laid down on the singular couch in the living room. As the movie started, Shauna walked in with a blanket and a bowl of popcorn. She set the popcorn on the coffee table and rolled into Jackie's open arms, covering them both with the blanket. THIS was what Jackie needed. A world where nothing existed but her and Shauna.

Jackie felt the skin on their thighs touch, and smelled the combination of weed and lavender shampoo on Shauna's hair. She breathes deeply, remembering how harsh Shauna was last night, how jealous Jackie had been seeing her laugh with Nat. Jackie wrapped an arm around Shauna's stomach, pulling her in tightly. She plays it off by saying, "Don't fall off the couch now." Shauna just laughed, grabbing the popcorn and leaning back into her chest. THIS is happiness, Jackie thinks. This closeness and comfort. This is all she wants for the rest of her life. She could put up with Jeff for the next 80 years if she had to, as long as this was how every Saturday for the rest of time was spent. She felt herself drifting off, breathing softly in Shauna's ear, lips almost touching the back of her neck.

When she woke up, her hand was under Shauna's shirt, touching the skin of her stomach. She knew Shauna wouldn't think anything of it and it felt really nice on her fingers, so she grabbed a little harder and pulled the other girl tight against her. Shauna laughed softly, "Oh good morning, Jax," she said softly. The TV was on, but it was just static. The movie must've ended.

"What time is it?"

"Like 6."

"Seriously? I've been asleep that long?"

"Yeah Jax," Shauna teased, "All that shit talk about getting up early this morning and putting yourself together and the first thing you do is take a nap."

"Oh stop it, I was tired! I damn near drank myself to death trying to keep up with you last night."

"What do you mean trying to keep up with me? You barely even saw me last night." Shit.

"Yeah you kept disappearing and coming back with a new drink. I wasn't sure what you were up to but I figured the least I could do was make sure you didn't get plastered by yourself."

"First of all, I was not the one disappearing, and second of all, hopefully you learned your lesson keeled over that toilet last night," Shauna laughed. Jackie groaned, remembering the way Shauna's lips felt against her neck. Her face felt hot all of a sudden.

"Oh shut up, Shipman, I was doing my best," Jackie laughed. Shauna peeled herself from Jackie's body and got up off the couch.

"Now that you're done snoring in my ear, can I put Can't Buy Me Love in?"

"Yeah, I suppose," Jackie said, watching Shauna bend down to look through her tapes. God she looked so good. She thought about last night, how Shauna's lips felt, the way her whispers in her ear sent a shock through her system. She was staring. She peeled her eyes away and turned her attention to the popcorn. The movie started to play, and Jackie opened her arms for Shauna to lay back down. Shauna set her head on Jackie's shoulder, so that Jackie could keep eating the popcorn, and Jackie placed her hand under her shirt on her stomach again, and when she did so, Shauna sighed and scooted closer to her, enjoying the closeness too.

Shauna moved her hand back behind her to rest her hand on Jackie's thigh. Jackie had to put effort into controlling her breathing, or this was going to be a real problem. She should adjust, move somehow to calm herself down. But the delusion was setting in again. Shauna DID kiss her last night, even if it was just a little peck on the back of her neck to try to make her feel better. No, it felt nice to be this close to someone that she actually liked. She deserved to feel this kind of touch, even if Shauna wasn't going to feel it in the same way.

She started to trace her fingers on Shauna's stomach, savoring the feeling of her skin under her moving fingers. Shauna sighed happily, which Jackie understood as a green light to continue. Shauna started to do the same on Jackie's thigh. Running her fingers up and down the outside of her leg. Jackie couldn't even focus on the movie. Just the feeling of Shauna's hand touching her like that. She knew it was just a comfort thing. They're both physical touch people, and neither of them felt great after last night. It was comforting to feel the skin to skin contact. "That feels nice," Shauna said with a smile and soft hum. She turned over on her back and closed her eyes, pulling Jackie's thigh across her body. Jackie prayed that she didn't feel the pulsating warmth coming from in between her legs on her hip. "My turn for a nap, okay?"

Jackie laughed and looked at her, "Okay, Shipman." But, Shauna's hand never stopped moving, and every time she moved her hand up a little bit higher before running it back down to her knee. This was going to be bad for Jackie, but this closeness is all she's ever wanted. Touching wasn't anything out of the norm for the two of them, but this had certainly never happened before. It wasn't THAT much different from everything else they did though... right? So, Jackie moved her hand in circles on Shauna's stomach. It was soft, and warm. Every circle she did, her fingers traced up a little higher, until eventually she could feel the fabric of Shauna's bralette on her fingertips. She wasn't sure, but she thought she heard Shauna's breath hitch. She felt herself get soaking wet listening to it, and watching her, feeling her hand. It was time to slow herself down. She rested her hand on Shauna's side, still under her shirt, but not nearly as risky, and Shauna sighed softly. Shauna's hand stilled too, just slowly moving her thumb back and forth against her skin.

The absence of Shauna's soft skin was loud. Jackie wanted more, selfishly. She stared at Shauna, eyes tracing her lips and her soft skin. She looked so beautiful, laying here in Jackie's arms. That's when the garage door opened. Jackie jumped, pulling her hand back out from under Shauna's shirt and said, "Shauna, babe, your mom's home. No nap for you," with a laugh, but it was more rushed and panicked than she had intended. Shauna didn't flinch. Like nothing even happened, Shauna whined and said, "I hope she brought food." Jackie filled with relief, grateful that Shauna didn't pick up on how much Jackie was enjoying their closeness, but she was also gutted. Again, the delusions were wiped away and replaced with reality. That's when she smelled pizza.

Shauna's mom assumed Jackie was there, because she usually is. They ate dinner together, talked about Ms. Shipman's day at work, and laughed with each other. Jackie always felt so much more at home here than she ever did in her own house. Shauna's mom was everything she ever wished her own mom could be, and since Kindergarten, she was more Jackie's mother than her own family was. After pizza, Shauna drove Jackie home, and like normal she waved goodbye and headed inside her own dark, quiet house.

Jackie felt fucking disgusting. The reality of the situation was setting in, and it became very clear: Jackie Taylor was a fucking pervert who got off on touching her best friend, when it meant absolutely nothing to her. She got in the shower and sobbed as quietly as she could, so she wouldn't wake her parents up, even though they wouldn't have checked in on her anyway. Tomorrow she needed to be better. She needed to commit herself to the life she was bound to have. Like she always does, she needs to react to her impulses by doing the exact opposite of the thing she wants to do. Tomorrow Jackie is going to have sex with her boyfriend.

Chapter 4

The next morning she thought, well... maybe she'll just do it tomorrow. Shauna called, and she wanted to go to the mall, so Jackie figured, you know, what's one more day? But then, should she really lose her virginity on a Monday? Like, a school night? That doesn't seem right either. So, maybe next weekend then. Yeah, next weekend would be good.

Jackie had been living in bliss. After feeling Shauna's hands on her, every little touch sent chills through her body. On Monday night, Jackie convinced her mother to let her stay at Shauna's, even though it was a school night. They were gonna be roommates in a few months anyway when they left for Rutgers, so what would it really hurt now? Jackie thought it was a very good point, but when she mentioned it to Shauna she just looked away and changed the conversation. "Wowza Shipman, you could've just told me you wanted to stock up on alone time."

"What are you talking about?" She looked up from her journal and seemed genuinely confused.

"You think after all these years I don't notice when you try to avoid something?"

"What would I be avoiding Jackie?" There she is, fucking snapping again.

"Just forget it Shauna. I can go home if that's what you want." Jackie didn't mean to react so quickly, it's unlike her to not just let Shauna's snippy comments go, but she was genuinely excited to sleep next to her in bed, which once she realized, just made her feel worse. Maybe she should just go home. She started grabbing her backpack and shoving her notebooks back in it.

Shauna rolled her eyes, "Jackie stop it. Of course I want you to stay. Why are you losing your shit right now?" She looked caught off guard, and Jackie thought that maybe with her emotions running high lately, she could have seen something that wasn't there.

"Fuck I'm sorry, I don't know. I think I'm just stressed out."

"Stressed out about what?" Fucking Shauna and her follow up questions. Jackie should really start being better prepared.

"I think I'm going to fuck Jeff. Like actually this time. This weekend." Shauna's face fell. Jackie always felt a little bad bringing up sexual and relationship stuff with Shauna. She's never dated anyone, and outside of a couple drunk makeouts at whatever party they went to, which Jackie fucking hated by the way, she hadn't done anything sexual really. But Shauna caught her off guard, and this was the first thing that came to mind.

"What made you want to do that?" Hmm, what to say to that? 'Well when you rubbed your hand on my thigh the other night I got so fucking wet I cried about it, so I figured I needed to balance it out'. That didn't seem like a very good option.

"He just... wants it, like really badly. He's been so nice about it, but I know I've been torturing the poor guy. He asked for it the other day and he's never outright just asked for it

before.” Shauna recoiled a little bit at that.

“Well, do you want it?” This made Jackie pause.

“I think so. I mean it was my idea I guess right? What am I going to do, realistically? Most girls lose it at prom, but we weren’t here for that, we were busy losing Nationals. I know I want to lose it before I go to Rutgers, and if I wait any longer it’ll be kind of mean because I’d have to break up with him right after.”

“Yeah that makes sense.” Shauna didn’t offer anything more and went quiet, so Jackie assumed she was in the clear.

“I’m tired of homework. I’m gonna go get ready for bed.” Jackie walked to the bathroom and took a deep breath. This was so wrong. Being this desperate just to touch Shauna was wrong. It felt icky in general but even more so since Shauna had no clue about it. But it’s not like she really had a choice in the matter. If she could turn her feelings off for Shauna Shipman she would have years ago. She takes her time getting ready. Taking her bra off and slipping into one of Shauna’s baggy Nirvana t-shirts and a pair of shorts. She washed her face and brushed her teeth before crawling into Shauna’s bed without a word. Shauna left to get ready next, turning the lights off while Jackie set the alarm.

Shauna crawled into bed behind her, wrapping her arms around Jackie’s shoulders and pushing her face into her hair. Jackie grabbed her arm and squeezed it. Running her fingers up and down it. Shauna sighed. “You’re excited right? About Rutgers I mean.” Jackie asked. Shauna loosened her grip and Jackie found her hand, interlocking their fingers. Shauna took too long to respond.

“Yeah Jackie, of course. Goodnight.” Something was wrong. That didn’t seem right, but ruining the night didn’t seem like something she really wanted right now. Right now, she needed to keep feeling Shauna’s strong arms and her hands and her tits pushed against her back, so she let it go.

“Yeah, sorry. Goodnight.” Shauna’s arm moved to Jackie’s waist, wrapping around the waistband of her shorts. A few fingers rested on Jackie’s skin and she clung to her strong arms as she closed her eyes.

Jackie woke up to Shauna’s bicep tightening and her hand finding its way up to her stomach. She can’t help but flex her abs and try to hold her breath. One wrong movement or breath and Shauna will wake up and potentially move her hand, which can’t happen. Her fingers started to move in her sleep, and her breathing got deeper in her ear. They ran over her toned abs, back and forth. Jackie’s breathing was getting more and more irregular despite her best efforts, and Shauna held her closer. It felt fucking good being touched like this, even if Shauna was doing it in her sleep. Shauna’s hands moved up and down the definition on the sides of her abs, each time moving further and further north and south. She was so gentle. Touching her so softly, thoughtlessly, but it meant everything to Jackie. She knew she wasn’t ever going to forget what this felt like. Shauna’s hand moved up and rested right underneath Jackie’s bare breasts. Her thumb sitting on the side of her ribs and her fingers just barely underneath. Jackie breathed deeply, as controlled as possible, but she was soaked.

She wanted Shauna’s hands just those few inches higher. Touching her the way she has always wanted. The right way, not like how Jeff does it, but she doesn’t. Instead, Shauna

moves her hand back down, and Jackie curses herself for breathing. She pulls Jackie closer and her hand shifts slightly so that her pinky finger is reaching just a little bit under the waistband of her shorts, which was fucking cruel honestly. Jackie couldn't help but push her hips back just a little, and she swore she heard a small quiet moan from the impact. This was so wrong. She was fucking SLEEPING and Jackie was making her react like this. It was WRONG. Jackie needed to go to bed. She slammed her eyes shut and did everything in her power to ignore the puddle between her legs. Needless to say, she didn't get much sleep.

The next morning, any idea in Jackie's head that Shauna was awake and had touched her like that on purpose, or honestly that it was anything more than just a dream quickly deflated. It was painfully normal as they got ready and drove to school, talking as if nothing had happened, and really, nothing did, so Jackie tried to forget the feeling of Shauna's hands and the sound of that little moan. But, of course that was never going to happen.

Chapter 5

On Tuesday, they went to Jackie's and turned on a movie. Again, Jackie let her hands wander, and Shauna did the same. They didn't talk about it, and honestly, Jackie thought it might all just be in her head, like a dream or something. She was 90% positive it was really happening, but nothing was going to come of it anyway, so why not just shut up and enjoy it.

On Wednesday, Jackie tried really hard to do her homework, but she just couldn't focus. Earlier that day they decided to get over the Nationals loss and head to the field to get some exercise in. Her thighs always looked so good in those shorts, her hair up in a ponytail. It was a miracle that Jackie had been able to focus on any kind of game while she had that on. She looked GOOD, and now they were in Shauna's attic, and she was in this tiny little tank top that covers like $\frac{1}{3}$ of her chest. Jackie was enjoying it a little too much, and Shauna wasn't even looking at her. Every second of every day Jackie's heart broke a little more.

The more she thought about Shauna, the more she talked about Jeff, regardless of the fact that she had been blowing him off the last few days, desperate for just the potential to be touched by Shauna. As a result, Shauna has gotten more and more snippy with her. It was cruel, really, to talk about her relationship knowing that Shauna never had that high school sweetheart, but it was like word vomit. She needed to express very clearly that she wanted Jeff, not Shauna, Jeff. It needed to be very clear to both Shauna and herself, and her brain couldn't stop reiterating it. It honestly was cruel of Jackie to even do to herself, so really they were even.

On Thursday, they got rained on. They were at the field again, kicking the ball around and having more fun with the sport now that they don't really have to take it seriously. It was a downpour, and they had walked to the field. The rain seemingly came out of nowhere and neither of them were even close to prepared. They sprinted back to Shauna's house laughing and giggling the whole way, and when they finally got inside, they were dripping onto the hardwood floor. Shauna grabbed them both a towel and got Jackie some new clothes to put on. Jackie went to the bathroom, undressing and throwing her soaking wet sports bra, underwear, shorts and shirt over the curtain rod in the shower before throwing on Shauna's clothes. She leaned down and sniffed the Shipman's laundry detergent and sighed. For half a second she wondered if Shauna would try to rest her hand under Jackie's boob again, since she didn't have a spare bra to put on. Then, she quickly removed the thought from her own head, replacing it with shame for even thinking about it.

She returned to Shauna's bed, again, and got under the covers. The run home was fucking exhausting, and she had been torturing herself by letting her mind run at night and hadn't gotten any sleep. She drifted off before Shauna even got back from the bathroom. She woke up to Shauna's hand in that same comfortable spot, but this time her thumb was running over her side boob, and Shauna's right thigh was slung over both of Jackie's legs on the bed. Well this was comfy.

Every time, it seemed like Shauna was getting closer and closer. Again, in her sleep. The feeling of Shauna's thumb was enough to make Jackie squirm without enough warning to

stop herself. Maybe she was asleep too? She ground herself into Shauna's thigh, and Shauna hummed in her ear. It was such a sexy fucking sound. Jesus, this felt so wrong, what if she was sleeping and hadn't meant for her hand to end up there? She is a bit of a cuddler, but she had never touched Jackie like this before. It was hard for her to believe that it was an accident, but honestly it was just as hard to believe it wasn't. She really should stop this, but Shauna was touching her first, and it just wasn't fair! Jackie had this internal debate for all of 3 seconds before Shauna's grip tightened and she pulled her closer. Jackie gasped and grabbed onto Shauna's waist with her hand. Shauna shifted her leg tighter to Jackie's, and Jackie suppressed a moan. Oh my god what was happening. Shauna tightened her grip and she was so close to just squeezing Jackie's boob, but not close enough. Jackie rolled her head back and she heard Shauna's breathing on her neck.

Fuck this was so hot. Then, just as soon as it happened, it was over. Shauna's hand moved back to her stomach and her thigh released the pressure it was giving Jackie. All Jackie could do was take some deep breaths and go back to sleep. What the fuck even was that? Shauna was definitely awake right? There's no way she just did all of that in her sleep, she couldn't have, right?

She woke up by herself in bed, Shauna's mom had just closed the front door and the smell of carryout slowly made its way up the stairs. She looked around and found Shauna at her desk, journaling. "Hi," Jackie said to her with a stretch. Her shirt lifted up and exposed some of her midriff and she almost thought Shauna's eyes locked on it when she turned to face her. She was losing it.

"Hey, you hungry?" Shauna asked with a smile. Did any of that even happen? Shauna was acting so... normal, when Jackie felt anything but. The internal debate that had been running through her mind felt mostly settled. If something like that did happen and was real (unlikely), Shauna would not have been able to hide it from her. There was no way. Jackie was so ashamed of herself, having wet dreams about her best friend while cuddling with her in her bed. Jesus christ, this was a new low.

"Fuck yes, Jeff's mom made us dinner last night and that shit was BLAND" Jackie laughed. Shauna gave a tight lipped smile and looked back to her journal, jotting down her thoughts. It almost felt like a rejection to Jackie, which was a little ridiculous. Jackie was jealous of that fucking journal. It got every thought Shauna had without having to analyze her. Jackie could never really figure out what was going on in her head, and all she wanted was for Shauna to tell her.

"Girls! Dinner's ready." Ms. Shipman yelled from downstairs.

Shauna laughed, "She says that like she made it."

"Close enough for me," Jackie laughed too, and Shauna grabbed her hands, helping her up out of bed. It felt domestic. Fuck, Jackie needed a cold shower ASAP.

They ate dinner together, which was again, painfully fucking normal.

There was a party Friday, at Randy's house. "Jackie I don't want to go to Randy's house, he's going to try to make a move on me."

"You probably won't even talk to Randy, the whole school's gonna be there!" Shauna just shot her a look, they both knew that was a lie. Randy was definitely going to find a reason to

talk to her. “Okay, well you can just hang out with me the whole night.”

Shauna rolled her eyes, “Do you even fucking believe that? You always say that and then you ditch me 30 seconds through the door.” Shit. She wasn’t wrong, and she saw things a little too clearly for Jackie’s liking.

“Fuck that Shauna, you’ll probably just end up smoking pot with your new bestie Nat anyway,” It was jealous and immature, but Jackie was caught off guard with the honest jabs the other girl had sent her way. Shauna laughed, a sarcastic, shallow laugh.

“God fucking forbid I ever talk to someone who isn’t you. You get to be Ms. Social Butterfly and leave the party to give Jeff a blowie and talk to fucking Mari and whoever else you deem worthy, but me? I get to stand anywhere between 3-15 feet away from you and just watch you makeout with your boyfriend all night until you decide we can leave.” And it was so very true. Ouch. Jackie felt tears well up in her eyes, but she couldn’t really be mad at Shauna. She was right, and Jackie knew she had been hurting her, but it was always better than the alternative. “I thought you’d like the alone time with Jeff anyway, aren’t you planning on fucking him tonight?” Jackie recoiled.

“What? No!” She said a little too quickly, her plan now completely forgotten. She recovered, “My first time is not going to be drunk at fucking Randy’s house. I already told my mom I was staying over here.” Another fucking eye roll. This was getting ridiculous.

“Of course you did.”

“Well fuck Shauna, my bad for assuming you’d want to spend time with me. I’ll call her right fucking now and tell her I changed my mind.” It was stupid, and probably a little manipulative, but fuck it, Jackie was hurt. All of Shauna’s brooding and eye rolling and saying anything except what she was thinking was starting to get on her nerves.

“I’m going to the fucking party Jackie, relax. You can stay, obviously.” Jackie paused and took a deep breath. There’s always so much fucking back and forth with Shauna. It’s exhausting.

“Good.” They sat in silence for a while, and then they both started to laugh, unable to ever stay mad at each other for long. They apologized to each other and got over themselves, but the panic of it all stuck with Jackie a little more than it typically would. This was all too much too fast. She knew that it was all in her head, but the dreams combined with the bickering and Shauna’s jabs getting quicker and sharper was kind of overwhelming. She really needed to get her shit together.

Same as usual, they got ready together, and ran out the door when they heard Jeff honking in the driveway. The party was in full swing when they got there. Taissa and Van were already trashed, stumbling through the front yard giggling. They waved at the two girls on their way in and shared a look that they both knew meant ‘oh it’s that kind of night?’ The three of them beelined for the kitchen and any type of alcohol they could get their hands on. Jeff just poured himself a beer that he’d sip on all night, as their DD he never got drunk at these things. Jackie and Shauna however, essentially split a bottle of vodka. Jackie was determined to be a better friend to Shauna tonight, she wasn’t going to ditch her. Jeff could have her tomorrow, but tonight she just wanted to be with Shauna.

"I'm keeping up with you tonight, Shipman. Give me your worst," Jackie said with a smile. Shauna raised her eyebrows and just topped off Jackie's drink with a laugh.

In less than an hour they were both stumbling. Jackie was trying to figure out why she always stopped herself from hanging out with Shauna at these things, it was fucking fun. Way more fun than she usually has. They played pong together, danced on each other (extremely PG, to Jackie's disappointment and also, kind of relief), and ran outside to go find Nat together. They probably didn't NEED anything more in their system, but fuck did they want it.

They found her, but she looked... kind of occupied flirting with that Travis kid, Coach Martinez's son. Interesting. She practically threw a joint and a lighter at them and told them to fuck off. They giggled and stumbled back into the trees. Shauna held the joint up to her mouth and lit it, blowing into it to get it to catch. She smiled at Jackie and took a long drag in, holding it for a second before the smoke came back out her mouth. It was fucking sexy. She took another short drag and passed it to Jackie, who was staring at those fucking lips, unable to stop herself now. Jackie drew her breath in and coughed all of the smoke back out. Shauna laughed and grabbed the joint from her, taking another small hit before putting it against Jackie's lips again and telling her to just relax.

"Just breathe it in Jax, nice and easy, let it sit and then just breathe out." Jackie's breath hitched at her closeness and she started coughing again. They both laughed and Jackie watched Shauna's lips wrap around the joint. Jackie plucked it out of her mouth and took a long drag, letting it go down nice and smooth. They locked eyes and Shauna smiled softly. Jackie hit it again to try to calm her nerves. Then just one more time for good measure.

"Wowza Taylor, maybe slow it down. You're gonna be absolutely fried." Jackie laughed at her and said, "I told you, I'm keeping up tonight."

"Well any more and you're gonna go ditch me for Jeff."

"What? Why would getting high make me want to ditch you?"

"Getting high always, you know..." Shauna blushed a bit and looked down.

"Always what? I don't know."

"You know... gets me going, if you know what I mean." Jackie's face got hot and she couldn't help but look down at Shauna's lips, luckily the action was concealed by Shauna taking another hit.

"And what does that have to do with Jeff?" Jackie asked, her mouth moving faster than her brain could. Shauna laughed.

"Because you want to fuck him, Jackie. The weed hit you fast as fuck" Thankful for Shauna's dismissal, Jackie forced a laugh. Shauna's horny, or she's going to be. Jackie's not sure what to do with this information.

Jackie took back the joint and finished it off. Eyes locked on Shauna's the whole time. "Come on Shipman, I need another drink."

"You're for sure gonna end up on the bathroom floor tonight," Shauna replied with a laugh. They stumbled back into the house and the kitchen. Shauna poured herself a beer and

handed Jackie a glass of water. 'I don't want you too fucked up tonight, Jax, water would be good.' Jackie gave her a little pout, and she watched Shauna's eyes linger on her lips. "Nuh uh, not gonna work. Water."

"Ugh, fine." Jackie downed the whole glass and looked up to realize that there were like 20 people left in the house. Most of them being Jeff and Randy's teammates. "Oh shit, what time is it?"

Jeff appeared behind her, "Like 3 am. Where have you two been all night?"

Jackie noticed Shauna move her eyes over his face, not something that she hadn't done before. Jeff was a pretty guy, funny and popular. It made sense that Shauna thought so too, and Jackie honestly kind of liked the idea that she had something Shauna wanted. In a twisted way it kind of got her off. Okay, maybe Shauna was right about the weed.

Jackie put her head on Jeff's chest, "We went and smoked for a while. I didn't realize how late it was. Are you ready to head out?" Jeff grabbed her by the chin and kissed her.

"Yeah baby, we can head out. Are you staying at Shauna's?"

"Yeah you can just drop us there." Jeff looked a little disappointed, probably hoping tonight would be the night Jackie finally said yes to him. He looked at Shauna, who wouldn't meet his eye, and Jackie savored Shauna's apparent discomfort over the thought of Jackie fucking Jeff.

They all got in the car, and Jeff drove them home. He kissed Jackie goodbye and she kissed him back. Like, really kissed him. Jackie knew that was the only kiss she was getting tonight and she wanted to make it count, even if it wasn't with who she wanted. Shauna cleared her throat standing at the door and Jackie snapped out of it and ran off to join her with a smile.

They giggled as Shauna unlocked the door and Jackie turned to her and whispered, probably a little too loud, "Shhhhhh, your mom's asleep!"

"No she's not Jackie, she's at work. Will be until 10 tomorrow."

"Oh, okay!" Jackie said a little louder. "I didn't bring any clothes, I'm gonna steal some, okay?"

"Yeah, Jax, whatever you need." Shauna said with a laugh. She grabbed a couple cups out of the cabinet and started to fill them up as Jackie walked up the stairs. She grabbed a tank top out of Shauna's dresser and a pair of soccer shorts. She went to the bathroom and looked at herself in the mirror. Jackie was excited to go to bed. She wanted to feel Shauna's hands again. The memory of her dream? or whatever the fuck that was came back to her, and she got butterflies. The thought of Shauna's breathing and her little moan combined with the way she looked smoking that joint was enough to leave a puddle in her underwear. Looks like she's going to have to sleep commando. She absolutely hated the thought of Nat or anybody else for that matter getting to see Shauna like that. Apparently, Jackie really needed to start smoking more often. She took her shirt off and started to unclasp her bra, but she paused, thinking about how every time it's off Shauna's hands find their way above the bra line. She couldn't stop questioning if the lack of a barrier meant Shauna felt an opportunity, or if it meant she didn't realize how high her hands were. She decided to leave the bra on. Shauna

will have the clear boundary, and if she chooses to cross it (she wouldn't, Jackie knew deep down), then that would mean she had a chance, right? Might as well, either way it would be the closest thing to an answer she could get. She heard Shauna stumbling up the stairs, laughing at herself, and Jackie knew it was probably time to get moving.

Jackie fit Shauna's tank top over her bra, and took her jeans and underwear off, replacing them with Shauna's shorts. She ran some water over her face, and drank some straight from the faucet before heading to Shauna's room. Shauna was getting into bed, a pair of shorts and a hoodie on her body. Fuck her legs looked fucking sexy right now. She looked up as Jackie walked in.

"Oh, hey. I grabbed you some water and tylenol. Probably a good idea to try to down most of it." Jackie thanked her and took the pills before practically falling next to Shauna in bed. They both laughed.

"Oh fuck, I'm wayyy more drunk than I thought I was," Jackie said.

"Yeah I don't think I even felt it until we were in the car." Jackie turned on her side and looked at Shauna. She was stunning. She turned to face Jackie too, and said "you look pretty cozy."

Jackie shrugged. "I could probably be cozier."

Shauna giggled and said, "Oh well let's fix that then," before she started pulling blankets over Jackie's shoulders.

"Wait wait wait," Jackie said as she turned over, facing away from Shauna. She could feel Shauna fill in behind her, assuming their usual spots in her bed.

"You looked really beautiful tonight, Jax," Shauna whispered. "I bet Jeff was losing his mind."

"Yeah, I bet he was," Jackie replied back. Shauna scooted in closer to Jackie and whispered goodnight. Her hand went underneath Jackie's shirt, and her leg moved over top of Jackie's, getting as close as she could. Jackie couldn't help but sigh happily. Shauna started making circles with her fingertips, and Jackie did the same on Shauna's exposed thigh. She felt her hand moving up her abs, closer and closer to Jackie's tits. Shauna paused, feeling the bra. Jackie knew they were both wide awake right now. She tightened her hand on Shauna's thigh, trying to let her know it would be okay if she wanted to, but being discreet enough that it could just be friendly.

Shauna traced her hands along the band of the bra, teasing her nails underneath it. Jackie pushed her head back, she was soaking wet, and it felt like she had been teased for like 10 years. She kind of had been. Shauna's mouth was on top of Jackie's ear, and she could hear every little hum, every little breath. Jackie's nails were digging into Shauna's thigh now, and she was completely under the control of the other girl. However far Shauna wanted to go, they would go. Jackie needed it so badly.

"Fuck it," Shauna muttered, so quiet that Jackie wasn't even sure it was meant for her to hear, and she pushed her fingers underneath the fabric of Jackie's bra. She moaned as Shauna's hands found their way to her boob. Definitely passing the threshold now. Shauna let out a soft little whine and let her hands search all of this new skin, parts of Jackie she had

never felt before. They didn't say a word, instead the room filled with their pants and their moans. Jackie's hand got higher and higher on Shauna's leg, resting on the back of her thighs, right at the cut off of her shorts. Jackie didn't dare turn around and let Shauna see how real this was. Instead, without looking she grabbed Shauna's ass hard over her shorts. Shauna moaned. Not a soft moan, not the little whine Jackie had gotten used to, but a real moan, from her throat. Jackie pushed Shauna's ass forward, rubbing her against Jackie's leg, making her moan again. Jackie would do literally anything to keep her moaning like this, but Shauna found her nipple and squeezed. Jackie had never felt anything like it before. It sent chills through her body and she ground her ass into Shauna's legs. She nearly screamed and heard Shauna groan and say "Oh my fucking god" in her ear.

Shauna pushed her bra and tank top up, revealing Jackie's tits completely. She moved her hand down Jackie's side, never letting go of her, all the way down to Jackie's hip. She gripped hard and moved back to Jackie's tits with the other hand. She pulled Jackie's ass back into her front and moaned into her ear. Jackie aligned herself better, to give Shauna as much pleasure as she could while they were grinding into each other. She moved her hand underneath Shauna's shorts and gripped the skin on her ass hard. This was literally the only thing Jackie had ever wanted, and she wanted it fucking BAD. Shauna's hand kept exploring Jackie. It started on her hip and moved over to the tops of her thighs. She was driving Jackie fucking crazy. Jackie spread her legs instinctually, practically begging Shauna to continue. Her hand moved in between her legs, playing with the inside of her thighs, and finally making its way to her pussy. Shauna was clearly not expecting her to not have anything on underneath her shorts, and Jackie could practically hear her melt over it in her ear. "Fucking hell," she said as she started to play in it. Running her fingers through her folds, moaning and breathing heavily the whole time.

Jackie couldn't take it anymore. She ground down into her fingers, using Shauna's ass to give her nowhere else to go, and her fingers slipped inside. "Oh fuck, yes," Jackie whispered. Shauna moved her fingers in and out so slowly, clearly not sure of exactly what to do but it didn't matter. It was fucking Shauna, and she had one hand on Jackie's tits and the other inside her pussy, so she could've been sitting still and been able to get off. Finally, Shauna curled her fingers up and Jackie gasped. It felt so good, every little movement went right to Jackie's head. She wanted to do this forever. Nothing with Jeff ever felt like this, this was fucking amazing. Jackie reached her hand back between Shauna's legs without even looking. She wasn't going to be able to do anything from this angle, but she had to know if Shauna was as wet as she was. Jackie's hand found its way to Shauna's pussy and she moaned again. She was soaked, practically dripping. That was enough to push Jackie over the edge. Her whole body shook and her hand reached behind Shauna's neck and held her close. Shauna pressed her lips to the back of Jackie's neck as her orgasm rolled through her.

She immediately turned over and moved in between Shauna's legs, pushing them apart. She looked up into Shauna's eyes and saw the desperate look in them. She moved Shauna's shorts and her underwear to the side and pushed her fingers into her. Shauna threw her head back and moaned. Jackie kept an even pace, pushing her fingers in and out, reaching deeper each time, and moved up to Shauna's chest. She lifted her hoodie up to expose her bare breasts and leaned down to suck one of them into her mouth. She sucked and licked at her nipple, listening to the way Shauna reacted. She had a hand in Jackie's hair, and held her head down on her tits. Jackie wrapped her tongue around her nipple, moving in circles with the same timing as her two fingers thrusting inside her. "Oh fuck, please don't stop, that feels so

good.” Jackie moaned at the words into Shauna’s chest. Jesus fucking christ. She increased her pace and Shauna’s ass lifted off of the bed as she clenched every muscle in her body and moaned loudly. Her hand clamped down hard on Jackie’s hair, pulling at it.

When her breathing went back to normal and Jackie had managed to slow herself down, she pulled Jackie back up to her level and held her tightly. “That was... wow,” Shauna said. Jackie smiled at her and neither of them said another word, focusing only on each other’s breathing as they fell asleep on top of each other.

Chapter 6

When Jackie woke up the next morning, she felt fucking amazing, which considering how much she drank the night before, really didn't make any sense. She was lying on her stomach, Shauna's arm was wrapped around her and her face was buried in Jackie's hair. She looked gorgeous.

She quietly worked her way out of bed and ran down to the kitchen. She started a pot of coffee and found an apple to eat while it brewed. Last night was fucking insane. It honestly felt like a dream... was it? Either way, Shauna's moans and the way her muscles flexed when she came would be burned into Jackie's memory forever. There's absolutely no way it could have been a dream though, right? This was so fucking confusing. Jackie grabbed two mugs and filled one to the brim, and filled the other half way. Shauna was a freak for drinking her coffee black, and Jackie might be determined to keep up with her alcohol consumption, but black coffee was something she was never going to be able to handle. She filled her mug up the rest of the way with some creamer and threw her apple core away before walking back up the stairs.

"Shauna, babe, wakey wakey." Shauna groaned in response and opened her eyes to look at the alarm clock.

"Jackie what the fuck it's like 9 am." Jackie laughed.

"I have coffee though," Jackie held the coffee mug under Shauna's nose. Shauna hummed and opened her eyes again, this time looking right at Jackie. Jackie blushed under her gaze, but Shauna didn't even react. Huh. Maybe it was a dream? Shauna was making it feel like absolutely nothing happened, when to Jackie, her whole life was flipped upside down last night. Shauna grabbed the mug and thanked her quietly. She sat up and took a sip before sighing and closing her eyes again.

"What are we doing today?" Shauna asked. Fuck. Jackie had plans with Jeff tonight. She was finally going to have sex with him.

"Well, Jeff was supposed to take me to the movies..." Jackie said, sounding unsure.

Shauna didn't miss a beat, "Oh yeah, I forgot about your plans." Strange. Jackie was hoping for maybe some avoidance, asking her not to go, and to stay with her instead, maybe a suggestion that Shauna would be a much better option than Jeff? None of that came, at all, actually, so Jackie just nodded and took a sip. "You still thinking about fucking him today?" Shauna looked down at her lap, refusing to make eye contact. Okay this was more the vibe Jackie expected, but she was still fucking lost. Talk about mixed signals.

"I don't know... should I?" Jackie was begging her to open up the conversation, or at least give any indication that she wasn't completely losing her mind.

Shauna looked up at her, "I mean you said you wanted to right? But if you don't... I was kind of thinking about heading to the field and maybe shooting around a bit." Jackie obviously called Jeff and cancelled their plans, suddenly her hangover was just too

unbearable to try to pull herself together for a date. They got dressed and headed to the field like nothing happened. Talked normally, laughed, joked, and bickered. Nothing was new. When Shauna dropped Jackie off at home, she grabbed Jackie's hand before she could stand up to get out of the car. She looked like she was going to say something, but decided on, "I'll call you when I get home okay? I love you."

Jackie smiled and squeezed her hand. "Talk to you later, Shipman." Fuck was this confusing as all hell. She still couldn't bring herself to say it. What if it was a dream and nothing had changed for Shauna and Jackie went and embarrassed herself for nothing? It was too risky,

Jackie took a shower to think about everything. She was confused as fuck and needed to sit down and try to figure it out with the water pouring over her. Eventually, she headed to bed with the understanding that while she was like 75% sure what was happening was real, if she tried to talk about it and it turned out she was just having hyper realistic sex dreams about her best friend, that would be very, very bad. So, she decided that it must have been a dream, or that she needed to at least try to believe it was until Shauna brought it up. She was holding out hope that maybe Shauna was just trying to figure stuff out and wasn't ready to talk about it, but deep down she felt pretty confident that this was the sort of thing that probably would have been discussed by now.

Then it happened again. They were watching MTV and doing homework. Their finals were coming up and they were trying to get as many assignments done as fast as they could so they could just be done with high school already. Jackie's logic was consistent in that she wasn't going to have sex with Jeff on a school night, so those plans were pushed back till the weekend, again. Jackie was on one side of the couch and Shauna was on the other. Their legs were touching as they quietly tried to focus on their school work. They had been objectively touchier than normal, but nothing inherently sexual, and Jackie had done a pretty decent job of convincing herself what happened the other night was nothing more than a dream. Shauna's foot was moving up and down on Jackie's thigh, so her attempts to focus were obviously completely helpless. She refused to look at Shauna, trying as hard as she could to stop being such a fucking perv. Then she felt Shauna's hands on her foot. That made her look up. Shauna wasn't even glancing at her, just reading out of her textbook while massaging Jackie and hey, it felt good. So, she let her do it, assuming she just wanted more skin to skin contact or was just doing Jackie a favor.

Jackie turned her attention back to her calculus. Shauna's hands were working away at Jackie's ankles now, her own foot still rubbing on Jackie's thigh. Jackie closed her eyes and took a deep breath when she felt Shauna's fingernails on her calf. Scraping at her skin just slightly before working her thumbs into her muscle. Jackie let out a small moan and leaned her head back onto the throw pillow, "That feels nice."

"Yeah you're pretty tight." Jackie's head snapped back to Shauna, who still wasn't looking at her. She was able to feel her wetness already. She wanted more of Shauna's hands.

"Wait, actually, do you think you could do my back? If you're being productive don't worry about it but it's been killing me all day," Jackie lied. Shauna looked up at her and said, "Yeah of course, all you had to do was ask. Lay down."

Jackie hurried to turn over on her stomach. She felt Shauna climb on top of her, sitting on the backs of her upper thighs. Her warm hands slid underneath Jackie's baggy crew neck and started to rub up and down her back. She slowly added more and more pressure to Jackie's lower back and started to gently massage her muscles. Jackie let out a low hum at the feeling. Shauna moved her hands up and ran into Jackie's bra. She moved over top of it to her shoulders and started squeezing at the nonexistent knots in the back of her neck. She moved back down to her shoulder blades and worked her way lower and lower until she got back to her lower back. She started to put her whole body into it pushing as deeply as she could, and Jackie could feel her thighs on the bottom of her ass. It was so fucking hot to be pressed completely into the couch under her weight. Her hands rested on her hips and she started to rub her thumbs in circles right above the waistband of her shorts. Jackie let out a small moan. Shauna moved one of her hands from Jackie's right hip to the back of her neck, holding her in place. Jackie arched her hips back at the feeling and she barely heard Shauna's little laugh. She took the opportunity to grab Jackie's left asscheek and push her hard back into the couch.

"Oh fuck, Shauna," Jackie moaned. Shauna's hands kept pressure on her ass, slowly massaging the muscle.

"You said you were sore." Shauna stated smugly as her fingers worked their way lower and lower on her ass. Soon they were on her upper thighs, working underneath her shorts.

"Yep. I am. So sore." Jackie groaned out. Shauna grabbed her hip and pulled her ass up so that Jackie's back was arched again. Jackie tried to look back at her to see the look on her face, but felt a hand on the back of her head pushing her face into the couch. "Oh fuck," she moaned out through the cushion.

Jackie felt her underwear move to the side and some shifting behind her before she felt Shauna's tongue licking at her. "Oh my fucking god," Jackie's hips bucked at the feeling and Shauna wrapped her arm around her thighs to hold her in place while she ate her out. She was hesitant at first, but it wasn't long before her tongue was buried in Jackie's pussy, eating at it like she was fucking hungry. Jackie had never felt anything like this before and she was loving every second of it. She reached down with her hand and started rubbing her own clit. That was all it took for her orgasm to roll through her. "Oh my god, Shauna." Jackie looked back and saw Shauna wiping at her face. Jackie pushed her down and pulled her shorts off of her, hungry for her taste.

Shauna moaned before Jackie even touched her. She rubbed Shauna's clit with her fingers and spread her wetness all over pussy. She pushed two fingers inside her opening and Shauna gasped. She fucked her like that for a while, holding eye contact with her, watching every twitch and every moan that left her lips before leaning down between her legs and licking her clit. Shauna came right away. Was she really this turned on? Just for Jackie? There's no way Jackie was going to just be done after that. She took her fingers out and Shauna thought she was done, but she replaced them with her tongue. She reached up with her hand and found those sexy lips and Shauna opened wide for her. Jackie pushed her fingers inside and Shauna closed her lips around them, licking and sucking them clean. Jackie wanted Shauna to know how good she tasted. She wanted to feel her tongue on her again, in whatever way she could. Shauna rolled right from her first orgasm into the second and she practically fucking screamed at the feeling. Jackie worked her through it and slowly let her come down and relax.

Jackie crawled on top of her chest and laid her head on her tits. They were both heavy breathing and Shauna was clearly out of it for a while before wrapping her arms around Jackie's shoulders and holding her tight. They both fell asleep almost immediately and woke up to the sound of the garage door opening and Shauna's mom's headlights in the window. Wordlessly, Shauna pulled her shorts back up and went to the bathroom presumably to clean herself up. Jackie cleared her throat and straightened up the couch a bit before grabbing herself a glass of water. This was fucking insane.

The night carried on again, absolutely normal. There was no mention of what had happened, no longing looks, no awkward energy. Just two best friends who were eating dinner with Shauna's mom.

This went on every day for the rest of the week. They would be completely normal, hanging out doing nothing, and then they would be having sex. Jackie was now 90% sure she wasn't just dreaming it every time, but she was still terrified of talking about it just in case she really was clinically insane and the 10% of doubt was there for good reason. They never kissed, they never really talked during it, and they definitely didn't talk ABOUT it. Every. Single. Day. Jackie was starting to lose it. She wanted to kiss her, so fucking badly, but Shauna didn't seem at all interested in it, and kissing seemed like it was too official. If they didn't kiss, there were very clear lines. It was sexual, and then it was friendly. It was not romantic. Kissing felt too relationshipy. If Jackie kissed her, maybe it would burst whatever bubble Shauna lived in where she could separate the two, and regardless of anything else, Jackie knew she couldn't risk losing this. This was the best thing that ever happened to her, and if she had to drive herself completely batshit crazy and live in a constant state of confusion to make sure it never ended, then that was just what she was going to do.

Jackie hadn't really talked to Jeff since all this started. She only felt a little bad about maybe? no, probably, cheating on him. It didn't even feel like the same thing, honestly. They were so vastly different, how could she even begin to try to compare them. She did feel bad about dodging him all week though. She just couldn't help herself, when Shauna was right there, ready to give her everything she's ever wanted, how could she even consider talking to Jeff? So, she would continue to stay on the phone long enough to get him to stop calling so she could stop making up excuses for why he shouldn't come pick her up. Finals were right around the corner and she needed to study to keep her grades up for Rutgers. Eventually, he just left her alone.

Chapter 7

Yeah, Jackie had about reached her limit. She was laying in bed with Shauna, who was acting WAY too fucking normal. “So, why haven’t you been hanging out with Jeff?”

What the fuck kind of question was that? Jackie laughed and just kind of looked at her, confused. “What do you mean?”

“I’m not complaining, but I went from like splitting time to getting you all for myself. Did something happen?” What the actual fuck was she talking about?

“Did something happen with Jeff?”

“Yeah.”

“With me and Jeff?” Jackie asked with disbelief and a very slight flirty undertone in her voice.

“Yes, Jax, Jesus keep up,” she said like Jackie was a fucking idiot, no flirting, no undertones in her voice. Just a question.

“Shauna what do you mean?” It felt pretty obvious honestly, how is this even a question?

“I’m just asking if something happened or if you guys are still together?”

So they really weren’t going to address it then? Seriously? Fine. If Shauna didn’t want to talk about it then so be it. “Yes. We’re actually hanging out in a couple hours, do you think you could take me home in a bit?” They didn’t actually have plans, but if Shauna wanted her to be with Jeff so fucking bad then she could make a call.

“Oh, okay, that makes sense. Yeah, I can take you home whenever, just let me know,” and she just looked back down at her book. Shauna was so infuriating. There is no possible way that Jackie could ever try to figure out what the fuck she was thinking. Shauna was quiet and just read her book for the next 30 minutes. This was so infuriating to Jackie, because she had been trying to make Shauna react. Trying to make her jealous, because she knew that if Shauna was the one leaving to go hang out with a boy who wanted to fuck her and kiss her and touch her, that would drive Jackie fucking insane. She wouldn’t be able to let Shauna through the door, but here Shauna was, just reading her goddamn book and driving her back so she could get ready for her date.

Jackie felt like an idiot. Shauna didn’t want her. Or maybe she did, but she was never going to want Jackie the way that Jackie needed her, craved her. It was just never going to happen. “Could you actually just take me home now? I want to make sure I can shower and look nice.” Considering they had fucked this morning, it would probably be a good idea, not that Shauna seemed to even remember it.

“Yes of course, let me just finish my chapter.”

It didn’t take long before Jackie was alone in her house. Her parents were out at a late lunch of some sort with whoever it was they spent their time with. As soon as she shut her

front door her heart sank. This felt like a prison and a never ending cycle, except before she had just deluded herself into thinking a lingering glance or touch meant Shauna could like her, but knowing realistically, that she didn't like girls. Now, it was so much worse. Shauna did like lesbian sex. She got off on it, she came from it. She just didn't want Jackie. Which was so much worse. Jackie would be there to fuck and then they could just ignore it. Shauna could get her fill of lesbian sex and then pretend it never happened, which Jackie assumed meant that Shauna couldn't want a relationship with her, she couldn't want anything more than sex. It was fucking heartbreaking.

She got in the shower and tried to escape this feeling. It didn't work, so she tried even harder as she put her skirt and sweater on. It didn't work, so she laid it on thick when Jeff came to pick her up. She insisted on him coming in, ditching their dinner plans and watching a movie in her room instead. She sat him down on the bed and she climbed onto his lap. She didn't say a word to him as she kissed him like she wanted to kiss Shauna. She grabbed his hands and put them on her hips and she ground into him. Why not do this now? What the fuck did it really matter anyway?

She felt his hands move up her skirt and grab her ass. He moaned into her mouth and it honestly just made Jackie sick. She looked up and his lips found her neck. He sucked on it and Jackie needed this to be over, quickly. She felt his cock hard in his pants and she reached down to unzip his jeans. She grabbed it and started to stroke it, avoiding eye contact the entire time. He asked her if it was okay, and she said yes. She laid down on the bed and he towered over her. Jackie had her eyes glued on the ceiling. She felt him take her underwear off and line himself up.

"Let me know if it hurts okay? Just tell me if I need to slow down." Jackie nodded and finally met his eyes. God, he was so turned on by this. Jackie felt like she woke back up from her daze. She looked back at him and tried to return the look. He put it in her and it fucking hurt, she was dry, and so uninterested in this. Her head shot back into the pillow and she tried to imagine Shauna's fingers instead, but it didn't feel the same. It didn't feel right.

"Oh baby, that feels so good." Jeff seemed to disagree with her. He started to pump in and out in a slow rhythm. It didn't feel as sickening, Jackie thought. If he was attractive in any way it might have even felt good. She faked a moan. Jeff grunted and pumped faster. "Oh god, oh god," he was going to cum, Jackie could tell. She pushed his hips away from hers and he started to jack himself off before cumming all over Jackie's sweater. She tried her very best to not look annoyed, or sick, or anything other than satisfied. That was the role she was supposed to play, right? She put on a smile and took a couple deep breaths while he groaned and calmed down.

"Jackie, that was fucking amazing. Thank you. Did you-?" Did she cum? No, nowhere close. Jackie almost laughed.

"Yeah, I did," she lied, 'it was great, baby.' She smiled at him and he returned it. Just a dopey little smile. She pitied him. This was awful, truly. She couldn't fucking do this anymore. "I think my parents are going to be getting home soon. Do you think you could drive me over to Shauna's after I change? I don't want them to be able to tell or anything." Jackie lied again. She knew he would say yes, so she didn't wait for his response. She got up and grabbed a change of clothes before heading to the bathroom.

She looked at herself in the mirror and silently started to cry. This was hell. She couldn't have Shauna and no matter how hard she tried she couldn't want Jeff. He had left a small hickey on her neck, low enough to hide, but evidence nonetheless. She washed her face and looked away from herself, changing quickly before grabbing Jeff and climbing into his truck and heading to Shauna's.

She walked through Shauna's door with a passion. If Shauna didn't want a relationship, if she just wanted sex and then ignorance, she was going to be the one to stress about it. Shauna had just gotten out of the shower and her hair was wet, she had a pair of soccer shorts on and a black sports bra. Jackie stormed over to her, pinned her against the kitchen counter and grabbed her face. She looked at her, just fucking WANTING her and let her eyes wander to her lips. Shauna showed no indication that she wanted to stop her, so Jackie kissed her. It was soft and gentle, and Shauna didn't return it. They separated and Jackie's heart was in her throat. She could have cried right then and there, but this was what she wanted right? She wanted a very clear rejection if it was coming at all.

Before Jackie knew it, Shauna had closed the gap between them, and it wasn't soft. It wasn't gentle. It was needy. She grabbed Jackie by the hips and pulled her tight against her while pushing her tongue into Jackie's mouth. She moaned at the taste and Jackie returned the passion. Oh fuck, this was everything she ever could have wanted. Jesus christ. Jackie grabbed the backs of Shauna's strong thighs and lifted her onto the counter. She filled the gap between her legs and kissed her harder. Her hands traveled up to Shauna's tits and squeezed. She pulled the sports bra up over them to release them and her tongue moved down to her nipples. Shauna's hands went to Jackie's hair and she gasped. Jackie let her hands run up and down Shauna's thighs, before pulling her shorts to one side and pushing two fingers inside her. Her mouth was still sucking hard on Shauna's nipples and she was moaning so loudly, so desperately. It didn't take long before Shauna came, but Jackie wasn't anywhere near done. She fucked her through it and right into the next one. "Oh my fucking god, Jax."

Jackie looked her in her eyes and dropped to her knees, needing to taste her. "Take these off, Shauna." Shauna was so eager that it took no more than a second for her to be sitting her bare ass on the edge of the countertop. She spread her legs and nodded for Jackie to start. She wasted no time and licked aggressively up Shauna's slit. "Fuck, baby. You taste so good." She wanted Shauna to know, so she pushed her fingers back inside and soaked them before offering them to Shauna to suck on. She held eye contact as she took them in her mouth, making a show of licking them with her tongue. She could not have been more fucking sexy. Jackie went back down and licked in circles on her clit. Shauna was bucking her hips and holding Jackie in place with her hands. She let go of Jackie's fingers to moan and Jackie pushed them right back inside of Shauna's pussy. Shauna thrustled sharply to meet her, and she came again immediately. The sounds Shauna was making were sending Jackie into a craze. She took her fingers out and replaced them with her tongue, wanting so badly to taste her. She darted it in and out before applying pressure and sucking hard on her opening.

"Oh my fucking god, Jackie, please don't stop." Shauna immediately came again, wrapping her thighs tight against Jackie's jaw and shaking uncontrollably. She jumped down from the counter and pushed Jackie across the kitchen and hard against the fridge. She kissed her roughly, licking herself off of Jackie's lips. Shauna moaned into her mouth and Jackie thought it was the best sound she had ever heard. Shauna pulled her skirt down roughly and grabbed Jackie's thigh, pulling it snug around her waist, wanting Jackie to wrap her legs

around her. Shauna held her up with one arm under her ass, she was so fucking strong, what the fuck? She used her other hand to push two fingers deep into Jackie's pussy.

"Oh god, baby you're so wet."

"All for you, Shauna, it's all for you, please." Shauna moaned and threw her head back, starting to really fuck her now, hard and rough. Jackie had absolutely no control over the situation and she fucking loved it. Shauna was holding her up, fucking her so hard she couldn't even get any words out. Her orgasms ran together so quickly she couldn't tell where one ended and another began. Shauna carried her over to the couch and threw her down. She pulled Jackie's shirt over her head and Jackie saw her eyes dart down to her neck. Fuck, the hickey. Shauna looked back in her eyes and Jackie saw something primal in them.

"You guys... you?" Shauna asked, and Jackie felt a little guilty. She hoped this wouldn't be the thing to end whatever it was they were doing. Jackie nodded hesitantly and watched Shauna's eyes darken. She jumped on top of her and moved her fingers in circles on her clit before taking her tongue and her lips and her teeth to the spot that Jeff had left on her earlier. She was REALLY sucking, and it was already bruised so it fucking HURT, but it was so hot. Shauna was claiming her. She was marking over top of Jeff, making him seem insignificant, which compared to Shauna, he was. She pushed her fingers inside her and started fucking her harder and harder, and Jackie was losing it. She was really just screaming now, and she came hard on Shauna's fingers. Shauna moved her lips back to Jackie's and kissed her as she worked through her orgasm, and they eventually just collapsed on top of each other.

Jackie laughed, "That was fucking insane... This is real, right?" She felt delirious, and was tired of second guessing herself. She needed some kind of confirmation.

Shauna laughed too, "Have you been thinking this was all a really convenient string of dreams too?" Jackie shot her head up and looked at her to see if she was being serious. They both started dying with laughter and Jackie held her close. How fucking crazy was it that they just so happened to be the same kind of crazy? It was kind of perfect honestly.

"When is your mom getting home?" Jackie asked with her eyes starting to get heavy.

Shauna looked over at the clock, "Like an hour," Shauna replied, taking a deep breath and helping Jackie off the couch. They collected their clothes that were strewn all over the house and very slowly moved up the stairs. They collapsed together onto Shauna's bed and passed out almost immediately.

Chapter 8

They hadn't been able to stop. Jackie just wanted to kiss her, constantly. Over and over again. It went on for weeks. Every spare second they got, they were finding a secluded spot to make out, to fuck, to touch each other. Jackie just wanted her so fucking bad.

It was getting less and less discrete, and they both knew it, Jackie thought that she cared, and she tried to stop herself, but the second Shauna looked at her it all melted away. Nothing mattered except her, and it was so nice to feel like Shauna wanted her. They still didn't talk much about any of it, or what it meant or what either of them felt, but it was easier now. Jackie didn't have to wonder if she was losing her mind, she could kiss her pretty much whenever she wanted, and she just kind of assumed Shauna felt the same way. It was unspoken, but comfortable, for Jackie at least. Shauna was still Shauna, she was still snippy and there was a very slight disconnect that Jackie had been ignoring, but this is all Jackie had ever wanted, and it was perfect, except for the small detail that was actually finding out what Shauna wanted, and what this all meant. But, Jackie was ignoring that, at least for now.

It was Friday, and Lottie was having a sleepover because the whole team had been so disconnected since they lost the game. They spent almost every day together since they were fourteen, and then they lost and now they barely talk. Jackie was grateful for the excuse to see them again. They had raided Lottie's parent's liquor cabinet and were playing a game of never have I ever. They had been pregaming for over an hour, just catching up and listening to music, so everybody was really starting to feel it now. Jackie was in between Van and Shauna, who was next to Nat.

"Never have I ever... been so hung over that I had to throw up," Shauna asked and shot a pointed look over to Jackie.

"Okay, okay, whatever." Jackie laughed as she took a drink, about half of the other girls drank too. It was Jackie's turn to ask, and she took a second to think before asking, "Never have I ever stolen anything." She watched Nat, Van, and strangely, Lottie all take a drink.

"Okay Ms. Goody Two Shoes," Nat glared at her.

"No, I need to hear Lottie's explanation for this one," Mari said with a laugh.

"I don't know why I do it honestly, sometimes it's just kind of exciting..." Lottie said with a shameful laugh. It was Van's turn.

"Never have I ever made out in a movie theater." Half the team drank, notably Jackie and not Shauna. The group shouted out a couple, "seriously, never?" s and Van said in response, "No absolutely not, never will. No need to disrespect a good movie because of all of your disgusting teenage impulses." The group laughed together.

"Never have I ever had sex," Taissa said. Jackie took a quick drink, guilty for having fucked Jeff. Obviously, Shauna knew. Jackie knew that she knew, but still she snuck a glance at Shauna, who didn't even look her way and just laughed with the rest of the group at Nat, Mari and Lottie. Nobody seemed to even notice that Jackie had taken a drink. Okay, so she

definitely should have given Jackie a look or SOMETHING, right? Jackie's drunk mind started to spiral. She was happy, right? Why did she have to start thinking like this? Did Shauna even care that she had fucked Jeff? Jackie had expected some kind of reaction or something, but never got one. Was that weird?

Her inner monologue was disrupted by Lottie, "Never have I ever done something I regret while drunk." Nothing really came to mind for Jackie, and everything that happened when Jackie had been drunk lately was fucking amazing. She turned to Shauna again, and saw her drink, not meeting Jackie's eyes. Okay so what was that about? Were they not really on the same page?. Or maybe it's about something else? How can she still not know what was going on? Wasn't that the whole point of kissing Shauna that day? So that she could figure everything out? She thought that she had... What the fuck was going on? There was chatter around her, everyone asking Lottie how the fuck she had NEVER regretted something she did while drunk. "If I wanted to do it drunk then I probably wanted to do it sober, and so what if I did something a little embarrassing if it made me happy? If I do something it's because I want to." She said with a shrug. Jackie looked back at Shauna who just looked down at her drink and took another swig. Interesting, and very confusing. Jackie laughed, this was all so insane.

It was Laura Lee's turn, "Never have I ever lied to someone I cared about." That was easy, Jackie's whole entire life is a lie. Everyone drank. Shauna finally looked up at Jackie, eyes looking kind of sad. What the fuck was going on in her head. The game continued for a while until everybody ran out of anything interesting to say. Jackie was sloppy drunk at this point, trying to drink away her confusion and her thought spirals. She was so sloppy she spilled her mixer all over her shirt trying to make her 8th drink of the night.

"Fuck me," she muttered under her breath. "Sorry Lottie, I'm a mess."

"It's okay babe, I can clean it up, just go grab a new shirt. You can raid my closet if you need to," Lottie said.

"It's okay I brought one, Shauna where'd you put our bag?"

"Upstairs, guest room," she said without looking up at her.

"At least she didn't spill the liquor," Jackie heard Nat say with a laugh as she climbed the stairs.

Jackie tore her shirt off and found the bag her and Shauna agreed to share. Her journal was in there, it was always in there. She would have 100% written about how she really felt about the whole thing. Jackie wasn't sure if she really wanted the answer. It wouldn't be the first time she snooped through Shauna's journal, but that doesn't make it less wrong. Jackie hadn't gone snooping since middle school, when she realized it can be a little brutal, and it could definitely hurt Jackie's feelings. The worst part is, once she reads it they can't talk about any of it because then she'd be admitting to invading Shauna's privacy. She knows it's wrong, and she's only done it like twice, but the girl is just so damn difficult to get a straight answer from, and it could save her some heart break if Shauna is just trying to have fun and feel good, or she can institutionalize herself if she is truly losing her mind. Or maybe if it's good, she could start a conversation about the whole thing. Maybe Shauna is on the same page as Jackie, and they could figure something out. Maybe Jackie didn't have to live that horrible gut wrenching life she's been doomed to her entire life. Maybe all she needed to do was just

flip a couple pages and her life could finally fit into place. It's not like Shauna had to know she did it, she didn't have a clue the other two times.

Jackie got up and shut and locked the guest room door, she was supposed to be changing, so it made sense and would've been a good cover if someone came looking. She sat down on the floor and opened the cover, flipping through until she found a blank page, then backwards through the pages until she found the most recent entry. Jackie dropped the book when she read the first sentence. I never should have fucked Jeff. What the ACTUAL fuck. This had to be some kind of sick joke. Jackie picked the journal back up and read the next few lines. She practically fucking forced me to. She's always been the center of everything—always getting everything she wants, everyone loving her. And I'm just here, in her shadow, fucking invisible to her and to everyone else. I've spent my whole life pretending it doesn't bother me, but it does. I hate it. I hate her, and it made me such a fucking miserable loser that I had to sleep with him, over and over again, for absolutely no reason other than to feel something. Over and over. What the fuck?

Jackie's whole life came crashing down. Shauna fucked him, over and over, to FEEL SOMETHING? All Jackie had been doing for the past month was feeling EVERYTHING. Clearly this was not the same fucking thing for them. Clearly, Shauna didn't give a fuck about her. She definitely wasn't happy. She hated Jackie, apparently. Apparently, that's what their relationship was. Maybe Shauna knew what she was all along, and just wanted to play with and hurt her. Maybe everyone was laughing at her, really, and her entire life was about to crumble around her. Everyone she cared about was lying to her, this life she had been creating for herself, so perfectly orchestrated, was far from it. She was so unbelievably fucking stupid. The tears started falling and she kept reading. What a fucking disaster, I don't even WANT him. And now all she's doing is fucking playing with me. She's never going to want me, why the fuck would she?

This was actually the worst possible thing Jackie could have found in that journal. She felt the hot tears running down her face and didn't even think before opening the door, not even bothering to put a shirt on, storming down the stairs in her bra, journal in hand. "What the FUCK is your fucking problem Shauna?" she screamed. She found the girls in the kitchen. Shauna looked shocked, then her eyes found the journal and she lunged at it, face going red, but Jackie wasn't done. "No Shauna, let's tell the class what the fuck you've been up to, why don't we?" Jackie was still in tears, but she couldn't even feel them, too charged with adrenaline to let anything stop her.

"Guys stop, what the fuck is going on?" Tai asked. Jackie answered her by starting to read.

"Jackie, stop, let's just go talk about it," Shauna said, still chasing her through the kitchen.

"I NEVER SHOULD HAVE FUCKED JEFF!" Jackie read loudly for everyone to hear. She started laughing like a crazy person, truly having lost her mind now. Everyone had a different level of shock. Ranging from little gasps to Van completely stepping in between Shauna and Jackie as Shauna lunged again for the journal. 'She practically fucking forced me to,' Jackie read, "She's always been the center of everything—always—," she's cut off by Tai grabbing the journal out of Jackie's hands.

"I think we all get the point Jackie, and this isn't gonna help the situation, honey," she said softly, softest she's ever spoken to Jackie before. Jackie just broke down and started

screaming directly at Shauna, “Is this really how you fucking feel about me?”

“Fucking stop, Jackie. We can just go talk. Stop.”

“Do you really fucking hate me so much you’d do anything to hurt me? Is that really what this is?” Shauna didn’t respond, just looked at the ground. The other girls just stood in silence, watching it all go down. “You fucked him while we...” Jackie paused, not too drunk or too angry to completely give herself away, but figuring she was fine, “while we were together?” Everyone would assume she’s talking about her and Jeff with how many times they had broken up and gotten back together, but Shauna would know what she meant. She didn’t say a word, just looked up, finally meeting Jackie’s eyes and she knew. She had fucked him recently. Maybe even earlier this week. Jackie hadn’t even hung out with him this week. What the FUCK.

“You are fucking despicable. You are a miserable fucking bitch Shauna, congratulations because you just completely ruined this. I LOVED you, Shauna. You were the only person who fucking mattered to me and you did THIS?”

Shauna had the audacity to roll her eyes and screamed back, “You have a really fucking funny way of showing it Jackie. I was never important to you. I was always just there. You bring me everywhere to sit in the corner and be a good little sidekick so that you can drop me off at home at the end of the night. You don’t see me, you don’t even fucking KNOW me, Jackie.”

“You are fucking crazy, Shauna. YOU slept with MY boyfriend, but somehow you’re STILL the victim? I had no idea you could be this much of a hateful, jealous bitch.”

“God fucking forbid I have my own thoughts, right Jackie? God forbid I have an opinion of you that you didn’t instill into me. That’s what you do, you know. You fucking force feed me your own thoughts like they’re supposed to be my own, like I’m some idiot toddler that needs guidance. I am so smart, Jackie. I am so capable of making my own choices. Believe me, Jackie, I got into fucking BROWN, I am completely capable.”

That felt like the final knife that killed Jackie. That was the last straw, it guaranteed that everything that had ever come out of Shauna’s mouth was a lie. She had asked her about Rutgers TWO WEEKS AGO. “You applied to Brown...” she said quietly, less of a question and more so just a statement of disbelief, and she felt her whole body go numb. She had no idea who her best friend even was. She could so easily hurt her, so easily lie to her, so easily sabotage her. This felt fucking evil. Jackie grabbed the nearest bottle of liquor and took a swig, before slamming it back down on the counter and leaning over it, trying to quiet the thoughts racing through her head.

Van was still standing between them, Tai still behind Jackie with Shauna’s journal in her hands. “I think you need to go home, Shauna,” Van said. Shauna grabbed her journal from Tai’s hands, who scowled at her as she started to walk upstairs.

“Guys, wait a second, how the fuck is she supposed to get home? You’re just gonna kick her out, drunk off her ass, alone in the middle of the night?” Nat asked.

“Maybe she can just call my boyfriend up for a ride, Nat, would that be a good enough compromise for you?” Jackie said with a scowl. Nat’s logical thinking was not what she needed right now, but fine, she’ll talk to Jeff. She walked over to the phone and dialed Jeff’s

phone number, wiping her tears as it rang. Nat snuck out of the kitchen and walked up the stairs. He answered. Jackie didn't even let him speak.

"We're done, Jeff. You are a fucking loser, and I don't even know why the fuck I'm still with you. Come get your bitch from Lottie's house, and then both of you can fuck off and never speak to me again." She hung up the phone and looked at the other girls. They were all staring at her. "He'll be here in 10." Jackie grabbed a bottle of vodka with about a quarter left in it, walked to the backdoor and let herself out, needing air immediately. She downed the rest of it as she shut the backdoor and threw the bottle as hard as she could into the side of the brick house, watching it shatter. She bent over and started laughing, and then crying, and then hyperventilating, before throwing up. She felt Van behind her with a jacket of some kind. She forgot she didn't have a shirt on. Van held her hair and rubbed her back, trying to be supportive, but all Jackie could feel was Shauna's lips on the back of her neck that night, making everything worse. She dropped to her knees and sobbed for an unbelievably long time until she passed out.

Chapter 9

Jackie woke up in Lottie's guest room, the one she was in when her entire life fell apart, with a raging headache and a sore throat. She looked around and found Van on the floor sleeping next to her bed. She closed her eyes again and fell hard back into the bed. She started to cry. She felt so unbelievably stupid. This whole time, she thought she was so sure that she had a handle on her life, some kind of understanding of basic facts. Shauna loved her, in what way she was never really sure, she assumed it was just a sisterhood, at a minimum they were best friends, but Jackie knew she would always love her in a much more serious way. Jeff loved her, probably too much, and would do anything for her, and Jackie couldn't bring herself to love him back. Turns out she was so horribly wrong about all of it. Honestly, Jeff cheating on her didn't hurt. It was a little embarrassing maybe, but if he had done it with anyone else Jackie might have even been a little happy for him. Shauna, on the other hand, she didn't know how to handle. Jackie had never felt pain like this. Her chest felt tight, but at the same time it was like her whole body was numb. She felt nothing but pain. Not only did Shauna not love her back, she didn't love her at all. It had all been lies, for who knows how long. She wasn't her best friend, she wasn't her sister, she wasn't her lover. She couldn't be anything, and impossibly, the pain of her absence in the rest of Jackie's life hurt more than the pain of the betrayal. She started to hyperventilate again and felt Van climb into bed with her, holding her and trying to soothe her.

"It's okay Jackie, just try to breathe with me, now." Van held them tightly together, Jackie was pressed against Van's chest as she started to take deep breaths. Jackie tried with everything in her to match her breathing pattern, but it just made her cry harder. She was shaking and scream crying when Lottie came into the room. She slid into the other side of the bed and held on to her tightly. Between the two of them, Jackie eventually just fell back to sleep. When she woke back up, Lottie was there with her, and she could smell bacon coming from downstairs. The thought of it made her nauseous.

"Jackie, babe, maybe we should head downstairs? You should probably call home, it's 4 pm." Jackie groaned, but slowly got up. She was wearing a big Halloween graphic tee, obviously Van's and the same soccer shorts she had on last night. They were Shauna's. Without saying a word she just walked down the stairs and sat down on the living room floor. Taissa was lying on the couch reading a book, and Lottie walked into the kitchen to, Jackie assumed, find Van.

Tai just kind of looked at her, and Jackie met her eyes. They shared a comfortable silence for a while before Taissa said, "It was fucked, I'm sorry." Jackie nodded and she went back to reading, an understanding between the two of them that Tai had her no matter what. The two of them almost never saw eye to eye, and never hesitated to tell the other when they disagreed, constantly bickering and arguing back and forth, but there was a certain kind of respect in that kind of friendship too. She knew that Tai would always be honest with her, and Tai knew that Jackie would do the same. Van came out with a plate of bacon and eggs.

"I know it's technically not morning anymore, but that's all I know how to cook. Will you eat something? It'll make you feel better." Jackie just shook her head no and fell to the floor

in a fetal position. Van looked at her sympathetically, before offering the plate to Tai, who took it. Jackie mumbled out a “Thank you, though,” and just stared at the wall.

Jackie spent the rest of the weekend on Lottie’s living room floor. She couldn’t go home. She felt catatonic, and wasn’t ready to put on a face for her parents. She knew she had to leave at some point, but she needed to look pristine, elegant, composed. That was the expectation. She called her mother and told her in the most cheerful voice she could muster that Lottie’s parents were out of town and she didn’t want to leave the girl alone for an entire weekend. If anyone had called the house since, Lottie didn’t let her know. Lottie had barely left her side since they moved downstairs, always so kind and comforting. Tai and Van stayed all day Saturday, but had to leave for their curfews, promising they’d be back first thing in the morning.

Jackie tried to eat but puked it all back up, and drank water only when it was forced on her by Tai, who promised to be more of an inconvenience than Jackie was prepared to handle if she didn’t. Sunday night, Van managed to convince her to get off the floor and maybe into the shower, she suggested very gently.

“Please, Jackie, you fucking stink,” Tai added. Lottie laughed, and Van shot her a look that made Tai laugh too, she shrugged and that made Lottie laugh harder. Jackie smiled and shook her head before walking upstairs.

“I put clean towels and clothes in the guest bathroom,” Lottie yelled up at her. She must’ve been hoping Jackie would bring up the idea of a shower for a while now. Jackie got in the bathroom and shut the door. She turned on the shower and saw the clothes Lottie laid out for her, soft sweatpants, a baggy grey yellowjackets shirt, and a pair of fuzzy pink socks. She looked at herself in the mirror and realized just how bad she looked. Maybe this is why her friends had refused to leave her alone for more than 10 minutes at a time. Her eyes were red and puffy with dark circles underneath them. Her whole face looked thin and pale, probably just in comparison to her eyes. There’s no way 2 days without eating would affect her that much, but then again, she was also throwing up every few hours too, so who knows. She undressed and looked down at her knees, which were cut up and scabbed over, they had some dried blood on them. Maybe she was closer to that brick wall she threw the liquor bottle at than she thought, or maybe she just hit some rocks or something and was too drunk to notice it. She hated the way she looked but couldn’t look away, it was like a car crash and all she could do was stare at herself as she began to cry again. She saw herself so differently now than she did before. She was a fraud, and a stupid one at that. She watched her tears fall down her face until the mirror fogged up and she couldn’t see herself anymore, she took it as a sign to get in the shower before Tai broke through the bathroom door.

Jackie sat down and let the water run over her. Finally out of her comatose state, all she could do was think. Over and over. How fucking long was this going on for? She thought about the look on Shauna’s face when she asked if she fucked him while they had been together. She felt sick again, had she been calling him late at night, or maybe meeting up with him at lunch, skipping classes to fuck each other? Is that how bad she fucking wanted Jackie to hurt? She said she didn’t even want him. It was demented. Had Jackie unknowingly licked Jeff out of her? She was making herself sicker by the moment. She just felt pain. She was hurt, angry, embarrassed, she felt like she was heartbroken and grieving but also incredibly

lonely and guilty. Had she really been so caught up in hiding herself that she was this awful? How had she not noticed the pain she was causing? Was this her fault?

Eventually, she stood up and used the soap in Lottie's bathroom to clean herself. She felt a little lightheaded but was feeling more herself by the minute. When she got out of the shower she put on Lottie's clothes and took a deep breath as she looked at herself in the mirror. She looked better, more like herself. She had to go home. She had no other choice, her mother would never let her stay over during the school week, and it was time for her to get out of Lottie's hair anyway. She needed to figure it out. She's put a fake face on her entire life, how hard could this really be? She had two weeks of school left and then she was onto better things. She opened the door and walked back downstairs to the living room where everyone sat talking in hushed tones. She could smell bacon and eggs again.

"Wowza guys, who died?" They all stopped talking and looked at her confused.

"Um, you did kind of for the past two days." Tai said to her.

Van cut her off, "You're feeling better?"

"Yeah, the shower helped. You made bacon again?" She asked. They looked at her, very clearly confused as Van ran to the kitchen to grab a plate. She silently handed it to Jackie and they all just watched in silence as she took a bite. Her stomach turned in opposition, but she took another for good measure and smiled at them.

"Yeah, no I don't buy this. You're half dead all weekend, saying a collective 6 words in two days and all we had to do to turn you back into the prom queen we all know and love was get you to take a shower?" Lottie said, point blank.

"Guys, it sucks. It's fucking awful what she did... what they did." Jackie stuttered over her words and her eyes started to water, "but I need to go home. My mom isn't going to let me stay another night, and what am I going to do? Just never finish high school because of that... because of her?" She took another few bites and finished the piece.

"You're going to school tomorrow?" Van asked.

"Of course I'm going to school."

"You know that they're both going to be there, right?" Lottie said.

"Why should I need to hide out in my room for the rest of high school? They're the ones that should be embarrassed, not me."

"Yeah, fair enough. Glad you're feeling yourself Jax." Tai stated. Jackie was grateful. The girls didn't seem convinced, but weren't gonna call her out on it. Instead, Van offered to give her a ride home and Lottie made her promise to call. Van told her that she was coming back tomorrow morning to drive her to school, and it wasn't up for debate. If she was going back, then they were going to do it together. Jackie was grateful, but was nervous about what to tell her mom. As uninvolved as she might have been, Shauna has been a constant, and her parents loved Jeff. It would be difficult to explain why they were just never around anymore. She's still trying to figure out what to say when she walks through the door and notices all the lights are off. There's a note on the counter.

Visiting your Uncle Jeremy. Be back in 2 weeks. Okay, cool. That makes that easy. Jackie decided to run herself a bath, unable to even enter her bedroom. It's littered in pictures. Nothing but Shauna and Jeff, they were Jackie's entire life, and she wasn't ready to handle the process of taking them down. In the bath she allowed herself to lose it again, completely breaking down in the water. She sobbed until she couldn't breathe, again, and more than anything just wanted this feeling to stop. She wanted it to be fucking over. If there was a way to move to Rutgers tomorrow she'd jump at the opportunity. As much as she talked about how she obviously wanted to go to school tomorrow, she was dreading it. How the fuck could she even fathom looking at Shauna and not breaking down? She couldn't possibly. Maybe that's the answer then, not looking at her at all. She wouldn't look at her, wouldn't react to her, she'd pretend Shauna wasn't even there. Apparently that's what Shauna had thought she was doing this whole time anyway.

Jackie went to their phone in the living room to see if there were any messages. Jeff had left a few, and Shauna had left one. She didn't even listen to them, erased all messages and unplugged the phone.

Having run out of tears, and made a plan for tomorrow, Jackie made herself comfortable in her guest room and went right to sleep.

Chapter 10

The next morning, Jackie got ready for school two hours early. She got up, showered, took her time doing her hair, picked out a tight skirt and a white button up top that was just ever so slightly see through and she knew would turn heads, and applied a vibrant shade of pink lipstick on top of her usual make up. She looked in the mirror to make sure her revenge tour through the high school hallways would be up to standard. She looked HOT. Van honked in her driveway and Jackie ran out to join her, plastering a smile on her face. When she opened the passenger door, Van looked her up and down (checking her out? Interesting).

“Okay Taylor, I see the vibe for today. You look good bitch, Jeff is gonna regret every decision he’s ever made.”

“Thanks babe!” Jackie exclaimed, “That’s the goal.” They drove to school cheerful, Van’s music was a little alt, and Jackie had never heard most of it, but she liked it. It wasn’t fucking somber like Shaunas, not that she was thinking about her, because she absolutely wasn’t. Jackie wondered why she hadn’t spent more time with Van. This was FUN. She was singing loudly (badly), and drumming along on her steering wheel. Jackie cheered her on and laughed along. When they pulled into the parking lot, the mood changed a bit. Van turned the music down and parked.

“You ready for this?”

“Fuck yes. They don’t deserve to think they fucked with my head.”

“YES, Jackie! This is what I’ve been waiting for.” They got out of the car and Tai got out too a few spots down. Jackie looked at them both.

“Did you guys seriously coordinate this?” They looked at each other and then back to Jackie.

“Maybe...” Van said.

“I know the last time you guys saw me I may have been a mess, but I really am fine.”

“Whatever you say, Jax,” Tai said, walking to catch up with them.

“Regardless, I do appreciate you guys. Thank you. I’m sorry you had to see me like that. I don’t know what was wrong with me.”

“You definitely don’t need to apologize. If that were me they’d have to send my diploma in the mail because this place,” Van gestured to the building, “would literally never see me again.” The girls laughed and walked into the building together. As much as Jackie wanted to just run away, she knew she couldn’t. At the end of the day, her social status was everything. How everyone saw her now, a prom queen, popular girl with her whole life ahead of her, also silently implied straight. That, she needed people to believe. So, she would show up to school, looking hot and composed, and remind people exactly the influence she carries.

Jackie found her locker and took a deep breath. No sign of either of them yet, but Jackie was almost positive that Jeff would try to find her today. Shauna knew not to try, but Jeff didn't know any better. She would let him apologize and satisfy him with a clean break. She grabbed her textbooks for the next few classes as Carson Haskins walked up to her locker. Carson was like Jeff's football twin. Jeff was the best mediocre player on the baseball team, and Carson was the best mediocre player on the football team. Really, he was the only other guy at the school that would align with Jackie's social status.

"Hey," he said with a dorky looking smile. He looked nervous. Jackie smiled at him, but in her head, all she could think about was how little she wanted to deal with this right now.

"What's up?" she asked. That's when she felt it. Shauna was somewhere, looking at her. It was extremely frustrating that even when she was pissed at her they were still connected in that way. Jackie could still feel her presence and would always know when her eyes were trained on her. Just as she felt it, Lottie appeared out of nowhere behind Carson and looked her in the eyes, and then shot a look over her shoulder and across the hall. She was behind her. Okay, she had a plan for this. She decided to flirt with Carson. She was single now, why not?

"Well, listen, I know you probably don't want to talk about it, but I always thought Jeff was a bit of a tool." Oh Carson, he really was trying wasn't he? Not exactly a great pick up line, but that's okay, Jackie had no problem carrying this conversation. She leaned in to him, putting a hand on his chest and smiling at him with her eyes.

She spoke in a hushed tone, "If I'm being honest, me too." Carson blushed a little at her touch and they both laughed.

"So, I take it you're over him? Maybe ready to try something new?" Is this guy serious? What girl who was cheated on 3 days ago would be ready for a new relationship?

"I'm definitely over him, something new, however, I think I might need some convincing first." It might've been mean to give the boy false hope, but it's not like it was really that different from what she did to Jeff, and she could really feel Shauna's eyes boring into her back. Why the fuck was she still around?

"Well why don't you let me try then? Can I take you to dinner?" No, I don't think so. She was going to just give him her phone number, but realized that she had unplugged their only phone.

"How about after school, you meet me here, and we can go for a walk and just talk for a while?"

"I'd like that very much. I'll see you here, 3 pm." He leaned down and kissed her on the cheek before turning around and walking to class. Jackie looked up and realized Lottie had disappeared, she turned around and saw Shauna walking away from her, having watched the entire scene play out. Good, Jackie thought. Let her fucking watch.

The day was uneventful. As expected, Jeff found her during their lunch period, apologizing, telling her it meant nothing to him and that she was everything he's ever wanted. Jackie just let him run his mouth for a while before cutting him off and telling him he wasn't ever going to convince her to change her mind about the two of them. She told him he just needed to move on. He nodded and walked away. She felt Shauna fucking everywhere, but

couldn't remember if it was always like that or if she was lingering extra today. Jackie never looked at her, and once even looked right through her in conversation with the girl from the basketball team who sat behind her. She didn't even let her eyes reach Shauna's face, just looked right past her without any acknowledgement.

Regardless of how much she could pretend to not be affected by what Shauna wrote in that journal, she couldn't get it out of her head. That was ONE entry. Only four sentences in a whole book, probably dedicated to her hatred of Jackie. It killed her. She wished she could have kept her composure a little longer to read every word in that book. She needed to know every fucked up word Shauna wrote about her, every thought she's ever had. If Jackie had access to every thought that had ever run through Shauna's head, she would without hesitation dedicate the rest of her life to the consumption of it. She knew it wasn't healthy, but she was obsessive about it. Her brain just craved the whole story, as much as she tried to push the feeling away, she couldn't escape it.

At the end of the day she found Carson at her locker, just as he promised. She smiled, and flirted, making sure to touch his shoulders and arms as much as would have been respectable. When he asked where they should go, Jackie knew just the place. She knew Shauna would be at the soccer field, and conveniently, within direct eyeshot of the football bleachers. Jackie and Carson walked around the school, headed back toward the football field. They made casual conversation and Jackie laughed and flirted with him with ease. He was kind, honest, and he actually seemed capable of having a fluid, intelligent conversation with Jackie. It was kind of nice to talk to someone who hadn't seen her breakdown for the past few days and had no idea how fucking awful she felt. She could feel herself relaxing with him a bit. They found their way to the top of the bleachers, and just as expected, Shauna was running laps around the field. Jackie sat with her back to the soccer field, knowing that Shauna would be able to feel her presence and that her eyes would find her here, laughing, flirting with Carson. She wanted Shauna to feel as unwanted and unappreciated as Jackie did. She wanted her to hurt.

Jackie leaned into Carson, her head on his shoulder as they talked. He was nice, really nice. Maybe she should have picked him all those years ago instead of Jeff. He wasn't cute enough for her back then though.

"How did you find out?" Carson asked. Jackie sat up and turned to face him. She saw Shauna out of the corner of her eye, sitting down on the field 'stretching', but really just watching Jackie. "About Jeff I mean." He clarified.

"Well, it was with my... it was with Shauna, you know Shauna right?" He nodded his head, really listening to her. "Something felt off. I was drunk and I read her diary." She grimaced, knowing that it was wrong. It was a bad thing to admit, invading someone's privacy like that.

"You always have to trust your intuition, guts never wrong," Carson said in response. No judgement, just understanding. Jackie could feel Shauna's eyes still trained on them. She was pissed, so pissed, and she leaned in and kissed Carson. She grabbed the back of his neck, and felt his hand reach up to her jaw. She wanted Shauna to hurt, so she pressed her tongue into his mouth and sucked on his bottom lip. When she pulled away he was grinning ear to ear. She realized how mean that probably was to him.

"Listen, I really don't want to date right now. This has been really, really nice, but I'm leaving for Rutgers soon and really don't want any commitments." She tried to let him down easy. She didn't even want a friendship with this man. She wanted to kiss him in front of Shauna's face and then go home and cry about it later. He took it well, he said he was grateful for the talk and for the kiss, and told her he didn't need it to be anything serious. If she just wanted to talk or just wanted to kiss, he'd be around until he left for college. He walked back down the bleachers by himself and Jackie turned to look at Shauna. They were so far away, but they still managed to make eye contact. Jackie stood up and walked back down too, meeting Shauna's eyes for the first time since she found out everything was just too painful to sit with. She needed to go home. It was a short walk to Lottie's house from the school, and Jackie decided that's where she wanted to go. She made it to the football field parking lot and Shauna was sitting in her car.

"Jackie!" She shouted across the lot at her. Just as she planned, Jackie kept walking, not looking at her or giving her any indication that she had even heard her. "Jackie, seriously, you can't just ignore me forever." She shouted again. Jackie just kept walking, all the way into the building, getting to some form of solitude and far, far away from Shauna. She walked out to the main parking lot that Van had parked in this morning and found Tai waiting in her car.

"Cmon Taylor, I'm taking you home." Jackie ran over to her car and climbed in.

"You waited for me?"

"Lottie told me you had your little show off date thing and I figured that probably wouldn't go well and wanted to make sure you had a ride home. What exactly was your plan?"

"It wasn't a date. I told him I wasn't interested." Jackie said, clearly ignoring the bulk of the question. Her and Tai drove in silence for a while. They arrived at Jackie's house and Jackie just sat in the passenger seat, too scared of her bedroom to go back inside. "Will you come with me?" she asked.

"Of course." Tai turned the car off and they walked inside together. Taissa noticed how empty it was. "Where are your parents?"

"Visiting my uncle for two weeks." Jackie walked up the stairs to her bedroom and paused at the door. This was harder than it should have been. She was supposed to be unbothered. She took a deep breath and opened the door. She looked at the pictures on her walls, moving her eyes to the one on her night stand. Her, Shauna, and Jeff, smiling together at one of the billion parties they went to together. Tai wandered around her bedroom, noticing the pictures and seemingly understanding the issue. Jackie felt very tired all of a sudden.

"You know, Lottie's parents are gone for the rest of the summer. I'm sure you could crash there for a while."

Jackie turned around sharply, having forgotten Tai was even there. "You think?"

"Yes, absolutely. She wouldn't mind. Grab some clothes and I'll drive you." Jackie tried to hide her excitement at the idea of not being completely and utterly alone as she packed a bag. She put enough clothes in to last her easily over a week, which could have been a little overkill, but better safe than sorry.

Chapter 11

Turns out, it wasn't overkill at all. Lottie's family was gone for the rest of the summer, leaving behind nothing but a cleaner and landscapers for the yard, so Jackie stayed at Lottie's for 9 days. She didn't once stop home for any reason at all. She knew eventually she was going to have to face everything, but right now, she could just hang out with Lottie, Tai and Van, not spare Shauna a single glance, and actually start to feel like herself again.

Tai and Van were pretty much there for every waking hour of those 9 days. Tai had to leave for dinners with her family every night, but just came right back afterward. They spent all weekend together, and Jackie was starting to feel okay. When people were around, it was easier to ignore the thought spirals in her head, the unanswered questions, and even worse, the memories of what Shauna tasted like. That was Jackie's biggest problem, her cherry flavored chapstick, Shauna's hands, she couldn't get them out of her head. No matter how much she hated her, and felt sickened by her, she still wanted her, probably always would. But being at Lottie's with everybody around her felt okay. This is what friendship was supposed to feel like, supportive and fun. It shouldn't be riddled with anxiety and constantly snapping at each other. She hadn't once looked at Shauna in the halls, but it was clear she was trying harder and harder to get her attention, but Jackie hadn't even been able to go home and deal with the pictures of Shauna in her bedroom, she couldn't possibly deal with the real thing just yet.

She had four days left before school ended, and she was hoping to just ride it out uninterrupted. She had contacted Rutgers, and been accepted into early housing so that she could participate in community service work on campus, getting ready for the school year, which was acceptable to her parents, and would help her with sorority rush too. She was moving in on June 16th. Three weeks.

Of course, nothing went according to plan. That next day, the final bell rang, releasing students from their last class of the day and Van would be waiting for Jackie to take her back to Lottie's house in the parking lot. Everyone was exhausted, it seemed like a race to see who could beeline it out of the building, but Jackie had felt like she was going to pee her pants for the last 3 hours and knew she was not going to make it to Lottie's house.

She went to her locker, packed up her bag, let Van know she was just going to use the bathroom quick, and Van said she'd pull the car up and wait out front. At this point, the hallways were essentially empty, and Jackie was alone in the bathroom. As she went to wash her hands, she heard the door open and looked over to find Shauna, blocking her exit. She dried her hands, and without looking up at her, tried to move past her to exit. Shauna side stepped and refused to let her through.

"Jackie, please. We need to talk."

"No, Shauna, we really don't." She tried to push past her again, but Shauna was stronger than her, she wasn't budging.

"I've been calling."

"I've been busy." She shot back, finally making eye contact. Fuck her eyes, Jackie looked away from them, anywhere else, and found her lips. They were just as she remembered them. She had wanted so badly to taste them again. Jesus Christ, she should not still feel this after everything. Her eyes turned to the floor.

"Where have you been staying? Your whole house looks like you guys just up and left the second everything happened. What's going on?"

"Why were you at my house, Shauna?"

"Because we need to fucking talk!" she yelled back. Jackie paused, she looked hot when she was mad.

"I read everything you had to say in your little book, and I'm not really interested in hearing any more." A lie, of course. If Jackie had access to Shauna's journal, every word would have been committed to memory by now.

"Are you okay, Jackie? You don't answer the phone, it doesn't even fucking ring, all I can do is leave messages that I know you won't hear, and then when I stop by your house, no one is ever home. I see you at school, and you act like I don't fucking exist—," Jackie's eyes shot back up to make eye contact.

"I thought that's what I was already doing, Shauna. Isn't that what you said?" Jackie wasn't going to give her the satisfaction of knowing where she was, or if she was okay.

"I get it, okay? I fucking hate myself for everything, believe me. I ruined everything, I hurt you in the worst way possible, I get it. But, I am genuinely fucking worried about you. I try to find you at school and Tai acts like a private fucking bodyguard, not letting me anywhere near you, and I just want to make sure you're okay."

"Don't pretend to care now Shauna." She took a step closer.

"Do you really think I don't care?"

Jackie ignored the question, not really sure of the answer. "You told me to fuck off Shauna, so I fucked off. Now, you decided that you don't actually want that. Actually, now you want me to... what did you say?... instill all of my thoughts into you and make you think them too?" Jackie was pissed now, reliving all of this for the first time in over a week. Jackie took a step forward, and they were nose to nose. "Turns out you really can't do anything without my fucking direction, huh?" Jackie was desperate to hurt her the way that she has felt hurt. "But wait, I actually never fucking knew you at all, right? Secretly, you were just this hateful, jealous—"

Shauna's eyes darted down to her lips and she closed the distance without even hesitating. Jackie lost herself in the kiss, finally she could taste her again, feel her again, and it felt SO good, but she was still so angry, and Shauna was confusing her now too. She reached behind Shauna's head and grabbed her hair, HARD. She pushed her back into the door and let her hands wander over Shauna's hips and stomach. She spoke into Shauna's mouth, "I can still fucking taste him on you." Shauna moaned and ground her hips into Jackie's thigh. This was a healthy outlet right? Stress relief. She pushed her hand down Shauna's shorts and dipped two fingers inside her cunt, she was already fucking soaked. Had she planned this? Had she thought about how this could go down?

“This is all I can ever think about, Jackie,” she whispered into her ear, reading her mind and confirming her intentions. She didn’t want to talk, she didn’t want to make anything right, she wanted to fuck. Fine. Jackie started fucking her, pulling hard at her hair and pushing her harder into the door. Shauna was moaning, probably too loudly, and Jackie could tell she was already close. “This is all I want, it’s all I want.” That was all it took to piss Jackie off, right as Shauna was about to cum, Jackie pulled her fingers out and licked them clean. She tasted fucking amazing. It took everything in her to not get on her knees for more.

“You had it, now you don’t.” Shauna looked like she was going to cry. She looked at Jackie and tried to pull her close.

She grabbed Jackie’s hand and said, “Fuck Jackie, no... please.” She moved her hand to Jackie’s hip, and something in Jackie snapped. ‘Don’t fucking touch me. Let me through.’ Shauna grabbed her and tried to hold her close, so Jackie pushed her back, hard. “Let me through Shauna.” Just then, the door started to open from the other side. Shauna hadn’t been prepared for that, and it wasn’t hard for Van to push herself through.

“Oh fuck no. Shauna, leave her the fuck alone.” Van grabbed Jackie by the arm and pulled her out of the bathroom. Shauna didn’t say a word.

The car ride to Lottie’s was quiet. Van asked if she was okay and Jackie nodded, but she had lied. She couldn’t still want her like this. After everything, she still couldn’t stop herself from fucking her. What kind of person would do that? Shauna had disrespected her and embarrassed her, hurt her so badly she couldn’t even go into her house, and Jackie still just wanted her so badly that she couldn’t help herself.

“Guess which psycho bitch cornered Jackie in the bathroom and wouldn’t let her out today?” Van asked Lottie and Tai when they got to the house.

“Are you fucking serious? What happened?” Tai asked.

“Well, you know I’ve been ignoring her, and I’ve seen her kind of trailing me recently, but I didn’t tell you because I didn’t want you to lose it on her and I really thought that she wouldn’t be interested in talking to me. I just thought she was being weird, you know?”

“For the record, that would have been good to know, but continue,” Van said.

“Apparently, she’s been showing up to my house, and calling, but I kind of unplugged the phone before I left, and I haven’t stepped foot anywhere near my house in over a week. She told me she had been trying to talk to me but that you guys were like my personal bodyguards, thanks for that by the way.”

“Yes of course, don’t mention it. What did you say to her?” Tai asked.

“I don’t even remember to be honest. I was a bitch, I know that. I threw her words back at her, told her I wasn’t interested in listening to what she had to say because I had already read plenty of it. She said she cared and just wanted to make sure I was okay, which is pretty much when Van came in and opened the door. I think I blacked most of it out, I didn’t realize how mad I still was.”

Everything was quiet for a half a second too long before Tai and Van turned to Lottie. Oh god.

“Don’t you think that maybe if you guys just had a conversation it would do you some good?” she suggested, but Jackie knew now that it wasn’t going to be much of a conversation. That’s not what Shauna wanted her for.

“Honestly, I just want to survive this shit and move on. I want nothing to do with her. I want nothing to do with this fuck ass town. I want to leave and never look back.

Now Van spoke up, “You guys were friends for so long, I’m not saying that you should still hang out with her or talk to her regularly, but this isn’t something where your pain is just going to go away. We’ve been trying to give you the space you need to take some active steps here, and Tai has been making sure she gives you that space too, but maybe it’s time? At least to plug the phone back in and see what she’s trying to say.”

Jackie thought about it, but the problem was she was so comfortable not thinking about it, that even entertaining the idea of a conversation made her start to cry. What would be worse? Life where she tried to talk through whatever this was, or life without Shauna in it at all, or the third option, life where she continued to fuck Shauna and ignored her in every other aspect? They were all bad. Tai didn’t say a word, and just looked at her, Lottie immediately wrapped her in a hug and Van just frowned.

“Okay, not tonight. I declare that tonight we will watch horror movies and eat popcorn and drink until this is all better, and tomorrow we are going home with you and figuring out what to do next.” Van probably let it go too easily, and Jackie felt like a little kid crying like that. But she had sex with Shauna today, again. They kissed, she felt her, and tasted her, and hurt her, and Jackie knew she loved her and also fucking hated her. She wanted her and wanted nothing to do with her. Everything hurt and everything was overwhelming. She wanted nothing more but to believe that Shauna did care about her, and did love her. But who the fuck would be so demented to fuck Jackie one day, sneak off somewhere to sleep with her boyfriend the next, and then fuck Jackie again later that night?

Just for that reason, Jackie knew she probably did have to talk to her. Like Van said, not tonight. But she at least needed to start preparing herself for the conversation. She needed to know, but she was in no state to know right now. When the FUCK did they have sex? It wasn’t that surprising that Jeff cheated, and Shauna was right there, so it made sense in a way that he wanted her. Who wouldn’t? She’s fucking beautiful and those sad eyes just make you want to make her feel better. But Shauna saying yes to him, that she couldn’t understand. Jackie always thought maybe she had a little crush, he was a pretty guy, but Shauna was never supposed to want Jeff more than Jackie. She was never supposed to do this. She was supposed to admire from afar and maybe even be jealous of the way Jeff got to have Jackie, but she wasn’t, she was jealous of Jackie. That wasn’t part of the fucking plan. Jackie needed to know every possible fucking detail of it. She needed to understand Shauna, because it was VERY clear that she never did understand her. Which made her sick to her stomach for a lot of reasons that she also couldn’t understand. This fucking sucked. It really fucking sucked.

They watched the movie, and Jackie got over herself and enjoyed what was probably the last night of the nearly two week sleepover. She would figure this out, but not tonight. Tonight, she was going to cherish every moment with her friends who for no real reason had decided to help Jackie in every possible way with no warning and no reciprocation. Jackie had been lucky enough to realize what real friendship was after realizing she had no clue for

so long. It made Jackie wonder, if her and Shauna were never friends, what the fuck were they?

Chapter 12

It was 10 pm by the time Lottie had convinced her to go back to her house. She had procrastinated all day, but eventually, Lottie told her she wasn't staying up all night so that Jackie could decide to go home at like 2 am. Jackie figured that she had inconvenienced Lottie enough in the past couple of weeks, so she got in Van's car and the three of them drove to the house together. Tai had to go home, her family claimed she hadn't spent enough time with them lately, and they missed her. This was something the other three girls would never really understand, but they were all glad that Tai had it.

As they drove, it was relatively quiet. Jackie was kind of nervous to plug her phone back in. What if her parents had panicked? How many voicemails would they have left? Lottie interrupted her thoughts, "What are you gonna say to her?" Fuck... Shauna. What the fuck even was there to say? Short of a brain tumor, there was nothing that Shauna could say that would convince Jackie to speak to her, which hurt, because really, all Jackie wanted was her friend back. Just when she thought she had everything she wanted, Shauna ripped it all away from her. No, there was really nothing to say.

They had discussed that Jackie would talk to Shauna tomorrow, and that Tai would be there, in a separate room just in case Shauna decided to go batshit and trap her again. Jackie insisted that this was unnecessary, but she couldn't convince them otherwise without completely exposing herself and what actually happened in the bathroom. She did convince them to let her tell Shauna that Tai was there at least, something she was grateful for, just in case Shauna did want to mention the fact that they had actually had sex like a dozen or so times leading up to this big blowout.

"I don't know, honestly. I'll just tell her to say whatever she has to say. Last time, I didn't even know how much I wanted to say to her until it was already out of my mouth, so who knows honestly."

"Yeah, I'm glad Tai will be there. It will be good for you to have somebody."

"I'm not sure I would've been able to keep her away honestly."

Van laughed. "You would not have." They pulled up to her house and Van stopped in the driveway. "Sleep in your bed, Jax. It'll be good for you." Jackie nodded, thanked them both, and gave them both a hug. She took a deep breath and headed inside. She turned the light on and headed to the phone, grimacing as she plugged it back in. She had been trying very hard to not think about how angry her parents could have been about the phone being unplugged. However, when the phone beeped back to life, and she was clicking through who all had left messages, she realized her parents hadn't left one. She laughed to herself and erased the 2 from Shauna. If she had something to say, she better say it tomorrow.

There was a knock at the door. Van must have some final words of encouragement before bed. She laughed and opened the door without even thinking, "Van, bro..." Those big eyes interrupted her. Shauna was here, at her house. This was not how it was supposed to go. It

was supposed to be planned, and prepared for. Not the second she walked back into her house.

“What are you doing here? Have you been fucking stalking me?”

“Jackie, I’m not stalking you. I— well I guess I can see how it might kind of be stalking. But I’ve been worried!”

“You’ve just been sitting outside my house? It’s so late Shauna what the fuck?”

“Will you just let me in? Please?” Jackie took a deep breath and let her through, fucking tired. At least this way there was no chance of Tai finding out they had fucked. She shut the door behind her and heard Shauna say, “Oh, you plugged the phone back in. Did you listen to my messages?”

“No. You can say it to my face. Say whatever you need to say.”

“Really?”

“Yes, Shauna. Say what you need to and then you can fuck off and never see me again.” Jackie hadn’t looked at her yet, eyes glued to the floor but she hoped that hurt her.

“I’m sorry, Jackie. I don’t understand why I did it. I wish I knew what to say, I’ve been trying to figure out what to say for months, how to tell you. But I don’t even know.”

She stopped there. What the fuck? All that convincing, showing up at her house late at night with no warning, just to say I don’t know?

“Seriously? That’s it?” Jackie finally looked up. “Are you fucking kidding me?”

“I don’t know how much you want to know.” Shauna looked genuinely sad. Her eyes were sunken in and red. But wait— pause. Did she say MONTHS?

“How fucking long has this been going on? Did you say you wanted to tell me for MONTHS?”

Shauna looked ashamed. Good. She should be. “It’s been like 2 or 3 months. It started at the party Mari threw for her 18th birthday. Afterwards, I guess, technically.”

Jackie didn’t even know what to say. She just stared at Shauna, tears in her eyes. Shauna spoke up, “I will tell you whatever you want to know. I never should have done it, and I shouldn’t have lied to you afterward, but I won’t now. I know you hate me, I know you want nothing to do with me, but you deserve to know... if you want to.” Jackie just looked at her.

“Do you want to know?”

Jackie responded, “Yes.”

“Everything?”

“I think so.”

Jackie couldn’t find the words to respond with anything more than that. “Then please, Jackie, ask me anything.” Shauna was pleading, and Jackie had a million things running through her head. All of the times Jackie got off on the way Shauna looked at him, all the

times she had Jeff drop her off first on the way home from parties. All of it. How many times had they fucked? 3 months? How could this actually be worse than she imagined?

“How did it start?”

“He dropped you off at your house after Mari’s 18th birthday party, and I was drunk and high. I started it, and he didn’t try to stop me.”

Jackie laughed. This was unbelievable. SHAUNA started it? “Get the fuck out of my house, Shauna.” She turned and started to walk upstairs, expecting Shauna to let herself out, but instead she was cut off. Shauna got in front of her and grabbed her arms. Jackie barely felt her, in a bit of a haze. Shauna had started it? Somehow Jackie hadn’t even considered that. She couldn’t think that badly of Shauna even after all of this, she assumed it had to have been Jeff to make the first move.

“No, Jackie. Let’s just do this. Let’s just say what needs to be said and we can move forward at least. I can’t keep trying to chase you down hoping that one day you might hear me or even fucking see me.”

Jackie screamed in her face, “I can’t fucking do this. I can’t hear about how you fucked somebody else. I can’t hear about the fact that you fucked MY BOYFRIEND, specifically to hurt me. You betrayed me in every possible way. I fucking LOVE you Shauna. I know you know that. I spent my whole life trying to love Jeff the way I loved you, and it was so easy for you to not only fuck him, but to hurt and betray me in the process. Do you understand how hard it was for me to pretend to want him and not you? But not you, Shauna! Not you! You had no fucking issue wanting him.” Jackie was crying and screaming and Shauna’s face was completely fucking blank. God she hated her. Hot tears were running down her face now. “You fucked him WHILE WE WERE TOGETHER? While we were doing whatever the fuck we had been doing? Was it all just some fucking game to you?” How could Shauna not FEEL anything? How could Jackie be crying and yelling and beating on her chest and Shauna just be completely blank.

Shauna spoke calmly, which did nothing but piss Jackie off more. “Yes. I did. I shouldn’t have, but I did. I know. I would do anything to take it back, Jackie. I really would.” She almost whispered it. Jackie pushed her back.

“I fucking hate you.”

“I know. What else?”

“You are evil, and heartless, and I don’t even understand why the fuck you’re here.”

“I’ve always been here. I couldn’t just not be here, Jax. I’ve been here every night for the last 2 weeks. Where did you go? Where are your parents?”

“No, Shauna. This isn’t going to go back to normal. You don’t get to know any of that anymore. You need to fucking go home, go to Jeff’s house, go fucking anywhere but here. Please.” Jackie broke down at the last word.

“You know that I don’t love him, Jax. I don’t want him.”

“I don’t know anything about you Shauna. Please just leave me alone.” Jackie turned away from her and started to walk away.

“Jackie! I did this, I know that I did this, but you—”

Jackie whipped her head back around, “No. Absolutely fucking not Shauna. I read those pages, I know what you think of me, that’s fine. Hate me, that’s fine. But you are NOT the victim in this, so don’t you fucking dare try to justify this with whatever you think I did to make you do it. You need to fucking leave. NOW.”

“I’m not trying—”

“You’re not trying to what? Hurt me?” Jackie cut her off again, she wasn’t ready for this. “You already fucking did, and I am telling you right now, I HATE you for it. I don’t ever want to speak to you again, I don’t ever want to fucking look at you again, Shauna. Leave. Go home.” Jackie watched two tears fall from Shauna’s eyes, and she hated that she felt nothing in response to them. There was a time when seeing her tears would make Jackie sick to her stomach, but it was different now. She couldn’t hear her right now, she might never be able to.

Jackie pushed her way through Shauna up the stairs and out of eyesight without looking back. Shauna didn’t say anything and she didn’t follow her either. Jackie sat down and listened to the front door open and shut. Everything about that conversation was fucking unsatisfying, but Jackie wasn’t prepared to learn that it had been going on for 3 months, or that Shauna had been the one to instigate it all. Again, all she could fucking feel was numb. She walked back downstairs and locked the front door before grabbing a bottle of wine and collapsing onto the living room floor. She finished about half the bottle doing nothing but staring at the wall before passing out.

Chapter 13

She woke up to Van banging hard on her front door. “Jackie! Are you ready?”

“Open the fucking door, Jackie!” Oh fuck, Tai was with her. Jackie’s head fucking HURT. She rolled off the couch and unlocked the door, which was all it took for Tai to throw it open and lock eyes with her. Jackie didn’t even have the energy to really care that she was making them late, she just wanted to go back to sleep.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t set an alarm.” Jackie said to Van, she watched Tai’s eyes go to the coffee table and the mostly empty bottle of wine sitting on top of it. Van looked at her and they looked back at Jackie together, confused.

“She was here. When you left last night, apparently she just has been sitting in front of my house waiting for me to be here.” Jackie grabbed the bottle and moved it to the kitchen counter.

“What? That’s fucking creepy, Jackie. What the fuck is wrong with her?” Tai said.

“What happened?” Van corrected.

Jackie grabbed a glass, apparently feeling a little classier today than she did last night, and poured out the rest of the bottle. “You guys are going to be late, just come by later and I’ll fill you in.”

“Yeah, cause we’re just gonna leave you here to drink alone all day while we sit through the third to last day of American History,” Van said sarcastically.

“What happened?” Tai asked more pointedly. Jackie looked up to meet her eyes.

“Honestly, not much. I embarrassed myself more than likely, I’m surprised the neighbors didn’t hear me screaming at her and call the cops,” Jackie laughed at herself, but it didn’t feel right and she choked on it. She washed down the fake happiness with a swig of her wine.

“What did she say?” Van asked.

Jackie looked down, eyes glued to her glass before saying, “She started it, 3 months ago.” Van walked over and wrapped her arms around her, it should’ve been comforting, but it wasn’t. Nothing probably could be. She looked at Tai and she wore a complicated expression. Her eyebrows were furrowed, and her mouth was in a slight frown, but her eyes were sad as she looked at Jackie. It made Jackie feel even worse, honestly, ashamed at how affected she was by all of this. She broke Van’s hug and downed the rest of her drink.

“This is so stupid, honestly, it’s been weeks. I need to just get over it.”

“You’re not going to be able to just get over it, Jax,” Tai said.

“Why not? I was going to break up with Jeff anyway, and I wouldn’t be the first person to lose a best friend when they moved away to college. There’s a little more drama in the way it happened this time, but it’s nothing that different than what most other girls go through.”

Jackie bore all her weight into the counter and tilted her head back, eyes trained on the ceiling. She didn't want to cry. She didn't want to feel so awful anymore. She didn't want to feel so fucking sorry for herself. She needed to move on, and if underplaying it was the route she needed to take then that's what she would do.

Jackie looked back at her friends and saw Tai turned toward Van, who looked like she was trying to send some kind of silent message to Tai, but she just shook her head slightly and turned back to Jackie. "I read the journal, Jackie."

Oh fuck. "What do you mean?" Jackie's heart was beating in her throat and all of the wine she had been drinking didn't seem too far behind it. That FUCKING journal was actually the bane of Jackie's existence.

Tai took a step toward her, treating her like a scared animal that might run with any wrong move. "When I took it from you that night. I read what she wrote. It's okay." It was definitely not okay.

"I don't know what you're talking about, Tai. I don't know what you think you read or what you think it meant, but—"

"Jackie... we're together." Van cut in, looking at Tai. WHAT?

"Who is together?"

"Jesus Christ, Jackie. I know you're drunk, but there's no way you don't know what she meant by that."

Jackie's eyes moved back and forth from Tai back to Van, and then Van back to Tai. How had she not noticed? They had basically lived together for two weeks and they had been around each other damn near every day for the last decade.

"Jackie, honey, we've been together for a little over a year now. It's okay. Seriously, you don't have to keep pretending that whatever was going on between you and Shauna was less than what it was." Van spoke to her so gently. Jackie's eyes welled up with tears, how obvious had it been to everyone else?

Jackie was embarrassed by what she was, and she felt ashamed for being angry that the two of them got to figure it out when Shauna had to ruin it the way she did. "Was it obvious? Does everyone know?"

"I suspected it, but Van didn't think so, we had an ongoing bet honestly until I read what Shauna wrote in the journal. It wasn't obvious, I can't imagine anybody else has a clue. Other than Lottie, she always kind of knew I think. She knew I was a lesbian before I did." Tai laughed a little. This was so easy for her, talking about everything out in the open, and Jackie couldn't help but flinch at the word. They were alone in her house, Jackie knew that, but it still felt like she wasn't supposed to be talking about it. "I wasn't going to mention it, I didn't want to upset you, but I can't just keep watching you like this. You don't need to be alone in it." All Jackie could do was nod and Tai wrapped her in a hug.

"It's going to be okay, Jax. You're going to figure this all out, I promise, and we're gonna be here the whole way." Jackie started to cry, unsure of what to say. She looked at Van, who just smiled at her and grabbed ahold of her hand.

“You don’t have to talk about it if you don’t want to, of course, so feel free to tell me to shut the fuck up, but... what exactly WAS going on between you two?” Van asked. It was a valid question, honestly, Jackie didn’t really know. Jackie turned to the cabinet above the fridge and pulled out another bottle of wine.

“Are you guys sure you’re okay with missing school?” Jackie asked.

“Dude, that shouldn’t even be a question.” Van responded while Tai pulled out two more glasses.

The three of them sat down on the couches, and Jackie poured out three glasses of wine. “So... spill.” Van said

“But only if you want to,” Tai corrected, shooting a look at Van not to pry.

Jackie took a deep breath, she had never said any of this out loud. It took her way too long to even mention it to Shauna, and even then they never really talked about much of it. “I love her.” Jackie let her head hang down. She looked back up to Tai nodding her head, but her lips were turned up in a bit of a smile. Van snorted, drawing Jackie’s attention. Jackie’s jaw dropped.

“I’m sorry, I’m sorry. I know that was probably big for you but, we kind of already knew that part.” Tai slapped her shoulder, but Jackie could see that her smile widened and it made her, in her more than tipsy state, start to laugh too.

“We were fucking.” Jackie admitted a little more easily now, with a slight shrug.

“THAT’S what I’m talking about!” Van exclaimed.

Jackie went on to tell them everything. She told them how badly she had wanted her for years, and then how she had her, kind of, and then of course, how she lost her. She cried through most of it, but had made her way through two more glasses of wine, so she was laughing through some of it too. She told them that Shauna had been fucking Jeff while they were in what Jackie thought was their little honeymoon phase, and Tai couldn’t help herself.

“I mean... didn’t you also fuck him while you and Shauna were together?”

“Okay, well that’s different though!” Jackie yelled. Tai laughed and raised her eyebrows, “One, I was SUPPOSED to be fucking him, she WAS NOT, and two, I wasn’t even completely convinced it was happening.”

“Wait— pause. What do you mean not convinced? I thought you guys had been having sex for like a couple weeks before you slept with Jeff?” Van seemed a little lost.

“Well... I kind of thought I had just been dreaming. Or like making it up and convincing myself it was real.”

Tai and Van looked at each other, obviously confused. “What the fuck do you mean you thought it was a dream?” Tai asked.

“Well, you know, I just thought I was having very realistic dreams... I don’t know.”

“Like... several times?” Van asked, her mouth hanging open with shock.

“Okay well I was like PRETTY sure it couldn’t just be a dream... but if it was and I brought it up then what? Then I’m just some fucking creep or pervert or whatever, and then it kept happening and then I was really lost...”

“I mean... I guess that kind of makes sense. I might kind of get that. Not the dreaming part, but the not talking part.” Tai said.

“No. Nope. That’s a little crazy Jax I’m not gonna lie. You had to have known.” Van said simply.

“Well, if I did, then I was in a very deep denial, so it’s not my fault. Shauna, however, is 100% at fault.” Van and Tai both nodded in agreement and took another sip of their wine. That’s when the phone rang. The two of them looked at Jackie, waiting for her to pick it up, but she just shook her head at them and let it ring. She heard her mother when the voicemail started recording. They were going to miss graduation. Their niece was graduating kindergarten and they were much more needed out of town. Tai looked at her with concern, but Jackie just sighed with relief and let out a little cheer. Van started laughing and said, “Listen. I know you’re in a bad spot, okay. I get it, but we NEED to throw a party.”

“Van!” Tai scolded.

“Please Jax! The last day of school, we’ll invite everybody over before graduation... like one last hurrah! Please...”

Jackie was drunker than she realized, because despite every oppositional feeling in her body, she found herself unable to say no to Van. She just looked so excited, and this one conversation was enough to make Jackie feel indebted to the two girls forever. Jackie had never realized how horribly alone she had been for her entire life. She didn’t realize that people she loved and respected could be like her. She didn’t think people like her could be loved and respected, much less happy or capable of a long term relationship. Yeah, she was never going to say no to any favor they asked, maybe for the rest of her life.

Jackie laughed, “Do whatever you wanna do, love, but you’re providing the liquor, and I’m pulling a Lottie. I’m not hosting, I’m not gonna be around, I’ll enjoy myself, by myself.”

Van jumped up on the couch, “YES! That’s the energy I was looking for! See, Tai? Stop being such a hater!”

Tai laughed and shook her head, “And if Shauna shows up?”

“Well babe, she’s obviously not going to be invited.” Van said.

“She’s been lingering outside the house for two weeks and you guys don’t think she’s gonna notice that there’s a party going on?”

“She’ll notice, but she’s not going to come inside. Let her sit and pout, honestly,” Jackie said, still numb to all of it, and drunk enough to convince herself it won’t fade the second the buzz wore off. Van ran to the phone, claiming that she needed to leave a message for Lottie when she got home from school, and Tai turned to Jackie.

“I have a feeling you’re gonna regret this, Jax.”

“I’m only here for another couple weeks, I want you guys to have fun, and I want to repay you. I can survive one night alone in my bedroom if I need to.” Tai just shrugged and looked

back to Van, who was walking back across the room.

“Okay, so now we need to address the bedroom you’ve been avoiding...” Tai said. Jackie groaned, but she knew it needed to be done, so she let Tai lead her up the stairs, and helped her pack all of the pictures and mementos into a box. Tai insisted that they should be thrown away, but they compromised on storage in the back of the closet for the next time they got a good opportunity to burn them. That idea excited Van, which was probably the only reason Tai allowed it. After the room was bare and packed up, Van pulled out Jackie’s polaroid camera and took a picture of the three of them.

Van shook the photo that came out and said, “Your walls don’t have to be empty, Jax. Just because she who shall not be named isn’t on them, doesn’t mean you’re alone.” Jackie smiled softly, before taking the photo and putting it in the small frame on her nightstand, replacing the photo of her, Shauna and Jeff. This was her family now, and it stung that it was different than Jackie had expected, but it was a damn good family, and Jackie was glad to have them.

Chapter 14

Lottie had stopped by for a while to hang out with everyone after she got out of school. She seemed a little distracted but when Tai turned to her and said, “Jackie knows we know... we’re good,” she smiled wide and said, “Oh thank god, I’m so happy for you Jax!” Jackie was grateful that she didn’t have to hide anything from the rest of them, but was terrified. She knew these girls were her friends and would never do anything to hurt her, but Jackie had never felt this exposed before in her life. They helped Jackie clean up the house a bit from their day drinking festivities as they sobered up a bit. A few hours later Jackie’s social battery was running low, and she could tell that Tai and Van were excited for some alone time. Jackie insisted that she would be fine, and that she was just going to take a bath and go to bed.

“So when I pick you up tomorrow, are you going to be drunk on the floor or like... awake even?” Van asked.

“I’m... not really sure that I’m going.”

“What do you mean you’re not going?” Tai asked.

“I mean... What’s the point? I hadn’t missed a day all year until now, and now it’s not like I’m shooting for a perfect attendance award. I took all my finals, I’m accepted into early housing at Rutgers, maybe I just pack and get ready for this party that I’m apparently throwing?”

“You’re just not going to go?” Tai asked again.

“No. Honestly, I just really don’t want to.”

“I already told you this was the route I would’ve taken from the jump,” Van said.

“I don’t know, Jax, this just doesn’t feel like you,” and maybe Tai was right, or maybe she had just been trying to keep up appearances before, and now she got a very small, but very real taste of what it feels like to not need to.

“Tai, listen, I love you, all of you, very much, but I can’t go, and worse, I don’t want to. I don’t want to... like at all, and I can’t find a good reason to anyway. It doesn’t sound like YOU, and I love you for that... but I’m not going.” Tai just kind of looked at Jackie, and then at Van, and then back at Jackie.

“Okay... yeah, true I guess. I hate the thought of leaving you here alone, but my parents would lose it if I tried to skip three days of school...”

“Oh no, I want you guys to go to school. I will actually be so angry if you skip for me. I promise I will never speak to any of you ever again. And don’t tell me it’s not that serious, Van, because it is for me. You guys will not blow anything off for me.”

“Jeez Jax, you need to chill the fuck out. We’ll leave you alone if that’s what you want, but I’m coming back over the second that bell rings, and that is not up for discussion.” Jackie laughed, and she accepted Van’s terms.

Then, she was alone. Suddenly, very, very alone. She ran herself a bath in her parent's bathroom, the fancy one with the jets and the full set of bubbles and scents to go with it, and before getting in, decided that a glass of wine would go really well with the rosemary scent of her bath. She opened a new bottle and poured herself a glass.

She got undressed and looked in the mirror. She remembered that hickey Jeff had left, and the way Shauna had attacked it. It was long gone by now, and Jackie missed it. She assumed at the time that Shauna was jealous, that she wanted to show Jackie how badly she wanted her, that she wanted to cover Jeff up and show Jackie that she was better, though now that didn't feel as true. Was she craving him instead of her? Was she jealous that he got to leave a hickey on Jackie but Shauna had to be his secret? Jackie really thought her feelings were reciprocated. That had really turned her on at the time, it really made her feel wanted, needed even, but now she realized that Shauna had just been playing in her face.

Jackie took a long drink from her glass and climbed into the bath. She leaned her head back onto the edge of the tub. She tried so hard to clear her mind, to think of absolutely nothing, but she just couldn't get her mind off of the way Shauna looked at her that night. That animalistic, primal look in her eyes was something sexier than Jackie could have ever imagined. Her legs were so strong, and Jackie remembered the way they squeezed the sides of her head as she came. She tasted so good, and Jackie wanted so badly to have that again. She wanted to feel Shauna's hands all over her. She wanted her tongue pressed against her neck and her nails on her back.

Jackie took another drink and against her better judgement, let her hand move down her stomach. She shouldn't still feel this for her, she hated her, but somehow that made her even fucking hotter. She let her fingers find her clit and started to circle it slowly. She imagined they were Shauna's tongue instead, and she let out a shallow breath. She let her fingers work faster and thought about how Shauna used to suck on her, how hungry she was for her, and before she knew it her orgasm was rushing through her body. Jackie let herself come down from it for a few seconds, and then immediately the tears started to come. She didn't even really understand why, obviously the entire situation was enough to cry about, but it just felt like everything was catching up to her, even though it felt like it never stopped catching up to her. She pulled the drain plug and finished her drink as the tub emptied. She stood up, dried off and walked to her bare room, with nothing on the walls but one picture. It was sweet at the time, but it would almost be better if it was completely empty, somehow the one singular picture made it worse. Jackie got dressed in the comfiest pair of sweats she could find and a big hoodie that she was 50% sure was Jeff's.

Jackie walked back downstairs and refilled her glass before she grabbed a few empty totes from the garage. She brought them up to her bedroom and started to separate her belongings into home, college, and trash. When she finished, she realized there was absolutely nothing in the 'home' section. Maybe she just really didn't want to be there, that would make sense. She placed the 'college' items in the three bins, leaving out only her bedding, and anything she might use in the next few weeks. She planned out her outfit for this party she was going to be hosting and packed away every other cute party outfit to wear at school.

Well, that was supposed to be a three day activity. What was she going to do now? She grabbed the bottle of wine, abandoning her glass and put *Pretty Woman* in the DVD player before collapsing on the couch and falling asleep almost immediately.

On the second day of her little vacation, she cleaned her entire house, and Jackie's house was fucking massive. She dusted, mopped, vacuumed, she even cleaned out the pantry, the whole deal, but she also finished off her bottle of wine, felt like a shame to let it go to waste. Lottie and Van showed up around 3, apparently Tai had some meeting for student government or something. Van noticed the empty bottle and frowned.

"That's a different bottle than the one we opened yesterday," she stated.

"Well yeah, we pretty much finished it off, and I wanted something to sip on while I cleaned." Jackie said it with a shrug, but it made her realize that it probably was a little concerning how quickly she had finished off three bottles of wine. She made a mental note to slow down a bit. Lottie grabbed the bottle and shook it.

"You FINISHED it? Damn Jackie!" Lottie exclaimed.

Jackie shrugged again, not sure of what she could say to talk herself out of it. It was probably kind of concerning, "Yeah, I guess I didn't realize how fast I was moving through it. Noted. I'm good, you guys can chill out."

"Don't piss me off Taylor, I'm not fucking around with this shit. I know you're struggling but you're not gonna be the bottle a day type of struggling," Van threatened.

"Okay, heard. I'm good, I promise!" Jackie successfully avoided their concern, and diverted their attention to the brownie mix she had found in the back of her pantry earlier. Tai joined them as they mixed all the ingredients and set the pan in the oven to bake, and Jackie was thankful that nobody had mentioned her overindulgence earlier. Somehow, she knew that Tai would be way more pissed than Van was.

Day three, and the second to last day of school was spent clearing out anything even slightly expensive, moving it to the basement, which would be padlocked. Can never be too careful with expensive family heirlooms. She got most of it packed away, including the half empty bottle of wine she had been working on all day by the time Tai and Van stopped by. They told her that Lottie had snuck away after school and said they had no clue where she went. It was weird, but not that weird for Lottie. They pretty much just let it go. Tai helped her move some of the bigger furniture so that Jackie could just check it off her to do list and not have to worry about it. That was actually the last thing she had on her list of things to do.

"Well... you could come to your last day of school," Tai said.

"Okay I'm not sure I'm that desperate for something to do..."

"What if I told you that Shauna hasn't even been there?" Jackie's head snapped up at Van's words and Tai shot her a look.

"I told you not to tell her that!" Tai whispered sharply.

She hasn't been around? What has she been doing? Jackie had been harsh but she didn't expect her to be that hurt by anything. Shauna had to have known what Jackie would say when she came to the door, right? "She hasn't been at school?"

"Well, she was the first day after your little... thing. Lottie told us, but we haven't seen her since." Van said.

“Van, bro... seriously?” Tai shot at her. Van just shrugged. Jackie’s head was reeling. She couldn’t help herself from wondering if she was okay, even though she knew she couldn’t check in. She didn’t even really want to. She just wanted to know.

“No. It’s okay, Tai, really. I’m not worried about it, it’s fine.”

“Yeah. Sure.” Tai responded with an eye roll.

“What? You think I’m gonna go crazy because she ditched school for a few days? Maybe she has a cold I don’t know.” Jackie purposefully avoided her gaze and made herself busy organizing the magazines she had been reading all day on her breaks.

“A cold? Really?” Tai responded. Jackie looked up at her but didn’t say anything and Van chuckled.

“Yeah, who knows? Could be.” Jackie shrugged and Tai let her play it off, for which Jackie was pretty grateful. “I’m still not going to school, but I can run to the liquor store and grab some stuff if you’ll spot me the cash, Van.”

“Okay yeah, this is a good plan actually, that way I can go grab a couple joints after school and not have to worry about it. Figured we could do more smoking and less drinking this time?” Van asked but really it was more of a statement.

Jackie gave her a pointed look and said, “Sure, that works for me!” trying her best to be as inconspicuous as she could be in front of Tai. It didn’t seem like she caught on to it. Van had to head out a little early to run some errands for her mom and Tai said she needed to get going too, but that she would help Jackie pick up a little bit first. As Tai was heading out of the door, Jackie stopped her.

“Could you do me a favor, do you think? Do you have time?”

“You want me to take you to go creep on Shipman?”

Jackie just kind of stared at her. How the fuck could she tell? “Would you think I was crazy if I said yes?”

“Yes, but I’ll still take you. Come on,” Tai said as she turned and walked out the door. Jackie struggled to put her unlaced converse on and hurried to follow her.

They drove in silence for a few minutes before Tai said, “I knew you would do this if she told you.”

Jackie tried to think of some reason why, but she knew there wasn’t one that would satisfy it. “How could I not?”

“Yeah, I know.”

They drove the rest of the way in silence before Tai rolled up to the Shipman’s street. Her car was in the driveway next to her mother’s. Her curtains were closed, and there didn’t seem to be any sign of her in the living room. “I guess I don’t know what I really thought I would find here.” Jackie couldn’t believe Shauna did this every night for two weeks. How was she not bored out of her mind? And she did it all to just not know what to say when Jackie finally let her in? Fucking ridiculous.

“Can I ask you something without you getting upset about it?” Tai asked.

Jackie hesitated, unsure of what the question would be. “Sure.”

“Do you really think you can go the rest of your life without ever seeing her again?”

Oof. Jackie didn’t know, honestly. She wanted so badly to see her, but she wanted the old version of her, and any time she budged a little bit and let Shauna approach her, the whole thing just crashed back down on her. It was so painful to even think about, she knew that she couldn’t have any kind of productive conversation with Shauna. “I can’t tell if this is just the average heartbreak, or if it’s something that will never end. I don’t think I really want it to be either.”

Tai nodded. “You didn’t exactly answer the question.”

“It feels like I will never get over her, and like I’m never going to stop feeling this pit in my stomach. Like I just feel this weight on my chest everywhere I go, and it’s so exhausting. If that can just go away at some point, if I can just get over it because it’s normal teenage girl heartbreak, then yes. I could go my whole life never seeing her again, but I really don’t think it’s going to be that easy.”

“Yeah...” That was all Tai really had to say, “Did you see what you needed to?” That kind of woke Jackie up from her thoughts.

“Yeah, sorry for making you drive all this way. At least Jeff’s truck wasn’t in the driveway.” Jackie laughed and Tai let out a surprised chuckle too. Tai drove her back home and dropped her off.

Before she shut the passenger door she said, “Jackie, I don’t know either, but it’s going to be okay. Really. It will be.”

Jackie reached through the car and gave Tai a hug before heading back inside and fishing out her bottle of wine. She took a swig and thought about Tai’s question. Could this really just last forever? There’s no possible way she could ever feel the way she felt about Shauna for someone else. It was exhausting. She climbed into bed with her bottle and just sat there staring at the wall. Soon enough, she had finished it and fell asleep in a drunken stupor.

Chapter 15

Jackie woke up late the next morning, still exhausted, and immediately buried her head back into her pillow. She glanced over at her alarm clock that read 12:04 pm and groaned before closing her eyes again. She was definitely not ready to deal with the day. She tried so hard to go back to sleep but just couldn't, so she rolled out of bed, in the same comfy pair of sweats and big sweatshirt she had been wearing for the past three days. She changed out of Jeff's yellowjackets sweatshirt and into a Rutgers one, hoping to pass off as a college student home early. The corner store rarely IDed anyone, and she would be there during school hours, so she wasn't really worried, but thought showing up in high school football gear wouldn't do her any favors.

She brushed her teeth and put a hat on before walking outside. It was warm and she was grateful, at first, for the feeling of the sun on her face. She walked the mile to the liquor store, and each step got more and more exhausting. The dull ache of her body felt like a total rejection of her leaving her house. She thought back to Shauna's house and wondered if she went to school today. She wondered if anyone had been telling her that Jackie had been ditching too. She wondered if she had anyone, and felt sadness and a little jealous upon the realization that it would probably be Nat if anyone. Nat had a special way of pissing Jackie off, and it was only fitting that she'd be the one to stand up for Shauna, the one to be there for her. Maybe Shauna could fuck her too. Why the fuck not?

All that thinking just made her more tired. She got to the store and quickly grabbed a couple gallon bottles of the cheapest liquor she could find, along with a couple cases of cheap beer. At the register she added another smaller cheap bottle of vodka that she could hide more easily if she needed to. Couldn't hurt to have her own little stash, it was practically repayment for hosting the party right? Only fair, she thought. The guy checking her out didn't even blink, just took Van's cash and grunted at her, which Jackie took as a signal that she was good to go. She thanked him and started her long trek home, where she broke open her new bottle and took a swig before chasing it with a soda from her parent's fridge. She spent so many hours of each day with nothing but her thoughts, and it made her so fucking tired and sad, all the time. A little bit of alcohol for a few days wasn't going to kill her, and didn't have to stress out her friends either.

Jackie set out the liquor along with some cheap mixers her mom had already had in the fridge, easy enough to explain away if they ever asked, or ever came back for that matter. She found some red solo cups in the basement the previous day and set that out too, before starting up Can't Buy Me Love in the CD player. It was Shauna's favorite of all the romcoms Jackie made her watch, and Jackie liked it too. It was usually a go to for the two of them. She took another quick swig, which was probably a little more than a shot, but Jackie decided it was just half a shot, and not that big of a deal, as the movie started to play. She watched it and felt nothing at the parts where she would normally cry. She felt nothing as she took another shot, which at this point she couldn't taste, and glanced at the clock.

Oh fuck. It was 3 pm. School got out at 2:30 and the girls would be over any minute. Jackie grabbed her bottle and sprinted up the stairs. She stashed it in her nightstand before

going to the bathroom to brush her teeth, hoping Van and Tai wouldn't be able to smell the liquor on her. Right as she turned the water off she heard the door open.

"Okay Taylor! I see you with the set up," Van yelled. Jackie heard Lottie laugh and she peeked down the stairs.

"I did what I could," Jackie said modestly, "You paid, so..."

"So really, if you think about it, this is my doing. You're so right, Jackie! What a great job I did."

"Wow, babe, you are so humble... has anyone ever told you that?" Tai said back to her. Jackie climbed down the stairs and walked toward the girls.

"Okay, listen, I love a good rom com as much as the next person, but is there any way we could maybe change this to something a little more interesting?" Van asked, not in a mean way, but in more of a 'I get you like it but it seriously is not a good film' way. Jackie laughed.

"Sure, babe. Whatever you can find is free game."

"Oh don't worry, she comes prepared," Tai said, Van turned around with a caught look and her hand in her backpack. She smiled as she pulled out a copy of Cruising.

"Can never go wrong with a classic," she said. She settled in on the couch and called the rest of them over.

"How do you even find this shit?" Lottie asked, cuddled up on the other side of Van.

"I have essentially no social life," Van replied without much of a look, totally ingrained in the movie.

Lottie looked at Jackie and smiled, "Makes sense then I guess," she whispered.

Jackie laughed too and settled in next to Tai to watch the movie. When it ended, Lottie said she needed to get a few things done before everybody got to the house later and dipped out without giving much more of an explanation. Tai and Van said they were in desperate need of a nap, and passed out on the couch all cuddled up almost immediately. Jackie was still pretty exhausted, but the sight of Tai and Van, so comfortable, and so healthy cuddled up next to each other happily, kind of made Jackie sick. Her stomach churned and she realized that she hadn't really been eating much. She went to the kitchen and made herself a grilled cheese.

Once she had finished eating, she went to her bed and passed out too, exhausted from the absolute nothing that she did that day. She woke up to Van at her bedroom door. "Wakey wakey! Time to pregame." That was all she said before turning around and walking back down the stairs. Jackie looked at her alarm clock, 9:15, she was shocked at how long she had been asleep. She got up and started to head back downstairs before pausing. She walked back to her nightstand and took another swig, assuming that Van wasn't going to be on board with her overdoing it again tonight. She tucked the bottle back where she got it and ran downstairs. Van was fishing through Jackie's CD collection trying to find something up to her standard and settled on Naughty by Nature as Tai poured out a few drinks for the three of them. Lottie still wasn't back yet, and people were going to be getting there within the hour. Jackie thought it was a little bit strange, but the second she thought about mentioning it, Lottie walked through the door.

Tai poured out another drink for her and they started to sing and dance. Van lit up a joint outside for them to share and by the time people got to the house, the four of them were feeling pretty good. Jackie's social battery lasted longer than she thought it would, it was already past midnight and it was just now starting to fail her. She was seconds from heading up to her bedroom to rot the night away before Tai came sprinting across the living room and into the kitchen. She was talking insanely fast, but Jackie caught the most important word of the sentence, Shauna. That sparked Jackie's interest.

"Okay, wait, repeat all of that but much much slower."

"I'm so sorry. I had no idea, but apparently, Lottie has been sneaking away to hang out with Nat? Weird, yes, but anyway... She's here. Lottie I guess invited her, which would be fine, but she brought Shauna."

What the fuck. Why would she think it was okay to show up at Jackie's house? What did Jackie do that would've given her that impression? Why the fuck would Nat think that was a good idea? What a fucking shit show. It was honestly a little disrespectful, and Jackie was drunk enough to be pissed about it. Fuck her social battery, she was pissed.

Tai could sense it. "Okay so I know how you feel about that, obviously, but Nat was playing bodyguard a little bit when I first saw them, and Lottie begged me not to beat her ass, but I will go kick them both out right now. It's your fucking house, so obviously that's what I will do."

"No. It's fine. Let her stick around, who fucking cares?"

"Well if I had to guess, probably you, but maybe I'll just get you another drink and we can pretend you don't?"

"Yes! Great idea." Van immediately came running up.

"Jackie! Shauna is fucking here! I'm so sorry!" she was screaming until Tai grabbed her shoulder and let her know that we had already been through this. She handed them both a shot glass and they downed it, Jackie was without need of a chaser at this point, and set it down for Tai to refill. She knocked the next one back too, took a deep breath and went to find Shauna. Of fucking course she was out back smoking a joint with Nat. Jackie stormed over.

"Are you fucking serious? I tell you I never want to see you again so you show up at my house?"

Shauna turned to her and started to say something but Nat cut her off, "It's a house party on the last day of school, Taylor. You wanted the entire senior class except for Shauna here?"

Jackie shot Nat a glare, "Yes, actually, and I wouldn't have minded if you had stayed home either."

"Nat, it's okay. I told you this wasn't a good idea," Shauna grabbed Jackie's arm and guided her out of Nat's earshot. "Jackie, listen, I didn't even know we were coming here until we pulled onto your street. I can go, really. I didn't mean to ruin your night."

"My night? You didn't mean to ruin my night? You ruined my life Shauna." Jackie couldn't help herself. It felt very very clear that this was never going to end. She was always

going to be angry, always going to hate her, and love her, and feel so betrayed by her, this is what it would always be.

“Jackie...” Shauna whispered. “If it makes you feel any better, I ruined mine too.”

“Why haven’t you been at school?” Jackie asked.

Shauna didn’t even look surprised, “Why haven’t you?”

Jackie just looked at her. She didn’t want to give Shauna an answer, but she couldn’t think of anything more to say because those eyes were bearing down at her. Her lips were slightly chapped, and somehow that made them more appealing.

“I know you were at my house, Jax. I thought you might have wanted to talk, but saw my mom’s car. That’s the only reason I walked through the door. I just thought you wanted something...”

Jackie kept staring, unsure of what to say. What did she want that day? Jackie didn’t even know.

“It was dumb. I’m sorry, I should have known.” Shauna started to walk away, presumably to tell Nat it was time to go, but Jackie grabbed her.

“You don’t just get to show up here, mess with my fucking head like this and just leave. What the fuck is wrong with you Shauna? Seriously are you trying to fucking kill me?”

“Let’s just go talk, please. You need something, I can tell. I want to give you whatever you need. I don’t want to ruin your life. Please.”

Jackie glared at her and turned on her heel, walking back to her house. At this point, a lot of people had seemed to clear out. It was late, Jackie supposed. Van was still keeping the music rolling and Tai was next to her. She spotted Lottie outside smoking with Nat and a couple stragglers were in the kitchen sobering up. Nobody noticed Jackie walking up the stairs with Shauna close behind her. Jackie went to her bedroom, leaving the door open for Shauna to close behind her.

“Jackie... I’m not trying to hurt you, I just... I don’t know.”

Jackie turned around and faced her. Her bedroom was dimly lit, and she saw that Shauna was wearing that red dress. Jackie had bought it for her, and she looked so fucking good in it. Shauna knew exactly what she was doing, there was no way she couldn’t. Her hair was slightly curled, and her collarbones were exposed. She looked really good. “You just what?”

Shauna looked at her, unsure of what to say. “You came here to talk, I let you talk, and again you have nothing to say. Why do you keep showing up here?”

“I just don’t want to hurt you, Jax. I don’t want to say something you’re not ready for, I don’t want to push you away even further. I’m trying to go at your pace, but...”

“But what?”

“I need you to guide me. Help me. Ask me whatever you want, please.”

“Why are you really here?”

"I-," Jackie took a step toward her and Shauna's words failed her, she tried again, "I can't stay away from you..." Shauna's eyes darted down to Jackie's lips and she licked her lips.

"You want me to ask you whatever I want?"

"Yes, please, Jackie."

"Did you like it?"

"I shouldn't have done it, Jackie, I regret it."

Jackie took another step forward, 6 inches away from Shauna now. "That isn't what I asked... you did, didn't you?"

Shauna's breath hitched, "I didn't... dislike it."

"You said you were gonna be honest, Shauna, didn't you?"

"Yes. I liked it."

Jackie took another step forward, Shauna backed herself into the bedroom door. "Did he make you cum, Shauna?" Jackie leaned into Shauna and whispered it in her ear as she locked the door.

Shauna whimpered, "Yes."

Jackie grabbed Shauna's hips roughly and pulled her close, making their bodies flush. She let her eyes drop to Shauna's cleavage and her hands slipped around the backs of Shauna's thighs under her dress, pulling it up over her ass, "Oh my god, Jax."

Jackie looked back up at Shauna, "Did you let him suck on your tits, Shauna?" Her hands pulled the dress up to her stomach, exposing her black thong, and Jackie moaned. She unzipped the dress, letting it fall to the floor and undoing her bra at the same time. As her tongue found Shauna's nipple, Shauna moaned out a whiny "Yes."

Jackie pulled away and let her thumb pull Shauna's lip down, tilting her mouth open before whispering, "Did you let him kiss you?" Jackie muffled her yes with a sloppy, hard kiss, and Shauna moaned into her mouth. Jackie let the kiss continue as long as she could go without breathing and she pulled Shauna over to lay down on the bed. She positioned her thigh over Shauna's crotch and ground into it, asking "Did he make you feel better than I could, baby?" Shauna had tears in her eyes now.

"No, Jax, no. He could never."

"Have you been craving this? Or have you just been getting your fix elsewhere?"

"Oh, baby, I've wanted it so badly. Please fuck me. Please." Jackie smiled at the way she begged, and moved her underwear to the side before pushing two fingers deep inside her. Shauna started to moan and Jackie covered her mouth and pushed her head into the mattress. Shauna's eyes rolled back in her head and she gripped the bedsheets hard. Jackie could tell she was already close, but thought she needed a little more torturing than that, so she pulled her fingers out and started to suck on her nipples and run her hands over Shauna's muscular thighs. Shauna whimpered and cried, and Jackie pushed her fingers back inside. Jackie had

covered her mouth again, luckily, because Shauna started trying to moan LOUDLY. Her hands gripped Jackie's and she could tell how badly she wanted to cum.

"Can you be quiet? Just for a second?" Shauna nodded frantically and Jackie released her mouth. "How bad do you want it? I want you to fucking beg."

"Oh, fuck, please. Please baby, please I want to cum so bad. I need it. Please!" Jackie threw a pillow over Shauna's face and moved her body down. She pulled her fingers back out and pulled Shauna's underwear completely off. Shauna thrust her hips at the now absent feeling between her legs, and Jackie used her forearm to push down her hips before diving in with her tongue. She licked Shauna from her opening up to her clit, and pushed two fingers back inside. She came immediately. She rolled through the first into the second, and then the third, before Jackie stood up and pulled her down by her legs to create space at the top of the bed. She pulled her underwear off, leaving her skirt on.

Before Shauna could say anything Jackie covered her face by straddling it, and Shauna moaned. She gripped Jackie's thighs and she offered up her tongue for Jackie to fuck herself on. Jackie grabbed onto her headboard and started to ride her face, feeling Shauna's hands run up to her bare ass underneath her skirt. Jackie moaned at the feeling, but stopped herself by biting on her own hand. Shauna's tongue was moving furiously, wanting so badly just to get her off. Jackie let her, cumming over and over again until her legs were too tired to continue. She fell off of Shauna's face and collapsed onto the bed.

"Oh my god, Jackie. That was so hot."

Jackie didn't even care anymore. She could only think of one thing. "You fucked him while we were together?"

Shauna's smile faded, but she answered, "Yes. Once."

"We were together every day. We had sex every day. When?"

Shauna sat up, covering herself with Jackie's blankets before answering, "You said you were going to fuck him. I was hurt. I was jealous. I thought that maybe I just wasn't enough for you, and I wanted to hurt you back, make you feel that way too."

Jackie grimaced at her words, "That didn't answer the question."

Shauna took a deep breath and replied monotonously, "Your mom wanted you home for some brunch with your grandparents or something. He called, said you blew him off all week. I don't know why, Jax, I wish I did—" Shauna started to cry. "You wanted him, and that made me want him. You talked about fucking him, and it made me want to. It felt so unfair—"

"Get out."

"Jackie, no, just let me explain it." Shauna grabbed her arm.

"Shauna, none of this was unfair to YOU. Just to be clear."

Shauna paused. "Bullshit."

Jackie turned slowly, "What do you mean bullshit?"

“You were fucking me when you were fucking Jeff, I was fucking you when I was fucking Jeff. I know. Believe me, I know that I was more wrong than you. I do understand that. But for you to be blameless here, and refuse to talk to me or even have a fucking conversation due to your fucking moral high ground, is insane, Jax.” Jackie sat there, in awe of her audacity. “I have been patient... I have tried to give you space, but you know what? It is fucking unfair to me. It was unfair to you... but now it’s unfair to me.”

“Oh well fuck me, Shauna, I’m sorry that I can’t bring myself to think about you without wanting throw up! I’m sorry that I can’t sit here, and listen to your explanation of how you ENJOYED FUCKING MY BOYFRIEND, without hating you. I’m sorry, Shauna, that it is SO UNFAIR to you for me to not talk to you.”

Shauna paused and tried to de-escalate. “Jackie— no that’s not what I meant and you know it.”

“Get the fuck out. Now, Shauna. Fucking leave.” Shauna looked at her like she was hoping Jackie would change her mind. “I fucking MEAN IT. GET THE FUCK OUT OF MY HOUSE.” That was all it took for Shauna to collect her things. Jackie took her bottle out of her night stand and took a long drink as Shauna threw that ridiculously sexy dress back on and ran out of her bedroom. Jackie looked at the clock, it was 3:57. She took another long drink and set her bottle on top of the night stand, which was the last thing she saw before she passed out for the night.

Chapter 16

Jackie woke up to a splitting headache and looked at her nightstand for the time, but found a glass of water and some tylenol had replaced the liquor bottle from the night before. Jackie drank quickly and downed the drugs before breathing in hard through her nose. It was all too much, it was way too much. Jackie knew she was self-destructing. She kept inviting Shauna in knowing she couldn't handle it, but she could not for the life of her keep the other girl out of her head. She couldn't seem to stay away from her. She pushed her head back into the pillow and closed her eyes, trying to will away her hangover... it didn't work.

Jackie stood up and immediately felt nauseous. She sat back down and doubled over, holding her head in her hands. The hangover felt kind of nice in a weird way. If she felt like shit physically, it could take away from her emotional pain. Kind of a win. She looked back at the time, it was 1 pm. She changed into clothes that were much more comfortable than the skirt and sweater she had fallen asleep in and dragged herself down the stairs. She found Tai and Van cuddled up on the couch, and Lottie with a bed of pillows on the floor. She took a deep breath, preparing herself for all the shit she was probably going to get for her secret vodka stash before croaking out a "Good morning."

The three girls all turned around in unison. Tai's eyes bared into Jackie's soul, and Van immediately asked, "What the fuck happened last night?," while Lottie looked like she already knew. She could probably just sense it, honestly.

Jackie plopped herself down next to Lottie and answered, "She showed up here because she thought I wanted to talk to her."

"Why would she think that?" Van asked again.

Jackie's eyes darted to Tai, who turned to Van and answered for her, "I may or may not have driven her to Shauna's house the other day."

Van sighed and pulled her head back. Before she could say anything Jackie said, "Yeah well I guess she saw us, and thought I wanted to talk but didn't because her mom was there, which for the record, was not what happened."

Jackie paused and looked at Lottie, then Tai. Neither one of them seemed very convinced. Van pressed on, "Okay so then she got here and what? We lost both of you until she came down here looking all sad and disheveled at like 4 am."

Jackie thought about the way she looked in that dress, and then how upset she looked last night. She sighed, of course she was upset, Jackie fucked her and then kicked her out. Jackie would have been pretty fucking upset too. "She was begging me to ask her whatever I wanted to know, and I knew that I couldn't handle it without making a scene, so we snuck up to my room..." she looked at Tai, hoping to see understanding instead of disappointment in her eyes. She did not get her wish.

"Continue..." Tai said.

“At first, it was fine. But the problem was that she was wearing that fucking dress, and her eyes were all dark and stormy and I just couldn’t help myself!”

“Oh my fucking god Jax, are you kidding me?” Van asked. We leave you alone for like 30 minutes and you completely lose it? “Jackie could tell she was mostly joking, but still there was truth to it. Van didn’t like that Jackie was running herself through this cycle over and over again, and honestly, Jackie didn’t really like it either. She was disappointed in herself. If it didn’t make her feel good when she masturbated to her thoughts about Shauna, what did she really think it was going to feel like after she fucked her?”

“Okay... well anyways, we got done and I couldn’t stop myself from asking why she had sex with Jeff after we had started fucking. It’s like... all the other times, maybe I could get past it. In reality, I was overcompensating when I was with him. Every thought I had about her I would force myself to take out on him. So maybe I can start to believe she was doing the same thing... maybe at some point, if she tells me that was why she did it, then sure. But while we were having sex? I can’t understand it. So I had to ask, and she told me that it felt unfair that I talked about him. I lost it on her... I don’t really remember what I said, something about how it was unfair TO ME. Period. And she tried to turn it around on me. Called bullshit, said I was being unfair and that she’s been patient, like I’m supposed to owe her something for that. So I kicked her out. I couldn’t handle it.” Tai looked fucking angry.

“Yeah of COURSE you couldn’t handle it. She showed up to YOUR house, claiming she wanted to do something for you completely unselfishly and answer whatever questions you had with total honesty, just to get defensive and try to flip it on you when you actually fucking ask. Unbelievable.” She rolled her eyes and looked out the window like she hoped Shauna was waiting out front so that she could confront her.

“Well... no she didn’t flip it on me because I asked. I think she was upset that I kicked her out,” a small detail, but Jackie couldn’t stop herself from defending Shauna in whatever small way she could. It didn’t sound like anybody really heard her, though.

Van placed a hand on Tai’s thigh, and asked, “So, can we just be done with this now? Did you get it out of your system? Can we just move forward?” Jackie looked at her, and there were tears in her eyes, “I don’t mean to be dramatic or sappy or whatever, but we’re all getting a little worried, especially because you’re leaving and going to be all on your own in a couple weeks... I just think it’s time to at least try moving on.”

Jackie blinked the tears out of her eyes and nodded at her. She felt bad for getting them so worried about her. Two months ago she truly thought she’d never have a very meaningful conversation with these girls ever again, and now out of nowhere they had turned into her biggest support system.

Lottie spoke up from beside her, “Jackie... I’m sorry that she showed up here. Honestly, Nat and I have been spending some time together, and I wanted her here, but I didn’t think she’d ever bring Shauna around. I would have never invited her if I’d have known.” Lottie seemed to feel genuinely awful about it, and spoke like she had beat herself up about it all night. It hadn’t even really crossed Jackie’s mind to be upset at Lottie, she was shocked.

“No, Lottie, I know that. Please don’t feel guilty, Shauna probably would’ve just shown up on her own anyway. I don’t blame you at all,” Jackie grabbed her hand and looked her in her eyes before continuing, “except maybe for your taste in partners, because fucking Natalie

Scatorccio? Seriously?” That seemed to break the tension. Lottie laughed, obviously caught off guard and playfully slapped Jackie’s hand away. Tai snorted and couldn’t help but agree with her.

Van cut into their laughter, “Did you see the tylenol Tai left you?” Oh, so that’s why Van hadn’t interrogated her. Thank god. Jackie nodded yes, “I’m gonna need you to go grab that because I am in dire need. Please and thank you?” Jackie laughed and agreed, running upstairs to grab the pills and bring them back down for the rest of the girls.

They spent the next few weeks entirely inseparable. Even Tai’s parents couldn’t stop them. Jackie hadn’t seen Shauna since that night, with the exception of graduation, where luckily they ended up in different rows despite how close together Shipman and Taylor were in the alphabet. She didn’t really want to see her, she realized. She missed her, and she had accepted that she was always going to, but she couldn’t keep doing this to herself or her friends. She needed to figure her shit out. She stopped the hidden drinking, she allowed herself to enjoy the moments with all of her friends, and even the rare moments alone didn’t seem so miserable.

Against Jackie’s better judgement, Lottie and Nat continued to grow closer. They were planning on moving in together when Lottie started her fall semester studying psychology at Brown, yes with Shauna, unfortunately, who she learned was studying English Literature. Fitting, Jackie thought. Jackie was unaware that Lottie had gotten in too, but she was a legacy and their psych department was really good, so it was hard to complain. Tai was majoring in pre-law at Columbia, and Van had planned a roadtrip to Ohio to visit her Uncle Randy’s film store. She planned to help him keep the business running and stay on the move, promising to visit whenever anybody wanted her to, but not to get in the way of Tai’s studies. This didn’t really surprise Jackie. Tai and Van were so secure in their relationship, she wasn’t worried about them. Van couldn’t afford to live in NYC, and Tai would get fed up with her being so bored all the time.

Jackie’s parents apparently were uninterested in helping Jackie move out or like checking in on her at all. Apparently, they were planning on moving away from her hometown at some point. When the girls heard the message on the voicemail, Lottie made Jackie promise she would come stay with her over the breaks, regardless of where her parents were. It was an extremely easy yes from her, and it took absolutely no forethought.

Jackie had talked her way into a private room in the freshman dorms, since Shauna had ditched her, and Tai and Van drove to help her move in. They promised to come pick her up whenever she wanted them to, and when it came time to leave, they just couldn’t. The three of them lived in Jackie’s dorm room for a week before Tai and Van could work up the courage to leave her there. They packed up their car, and once again, Jackie was completely alone.

She started her volunteer work at the local community center the next day, focused on outreach and event planning. It was something she knew she could be good at. Her team leadership would translate well into communication and public relations. Jackie was good at that kind of thing, realizing what people wanted from her before they had to ask, making people see something in a certain light or influencing people to support a cause. She learned to really enjoy it. She liked knowing that she could make a difference in something, but when she got back to her dorm and was by herself, she realized how lonely she was. She called often, but it didn’t always help to hear everybody on the line without her. Apparently, Nat had

tried bringing Shauna around once to one of their kickbacks at Lottie's house, and Tai damn near tore her head off. Jackie knew that she should find it funny, or be grateful for Tai's protection, but honestly, it just made her feel more awful. She didn't like that Jackie had put Lottie and Nat in this situation where they had to choose, and deep down, she knew she didn't like the thought of Shauna completely alone now either.

She started to spend time at different places around the city, by herself but not alone, exactly. It was kind of comforting. She was supposed to be socializing, and planning out how she was going to rush all the different campus sororities, but she couldn't bring herself to do it. She had thought she wanted that, but she never did. After spending so much time being entirely herself with Tai, Van and Lottie, she couldn't put the facade back on no matter how hard she tried.

Chapter 17

About a week before her classes started, she stumbled into a new bar, a dingy little place on the outskirts of the city. She used the fake ID that she had gotten her sophomore year of high school, but never really needed. It was probably a few years too old for her now, but nobody ever really cared enough to call her on it. She walked up to the bar and sat down. When the bartender turned around, Jackie was met with beautiful dark features. Her skin was a deep bronze and her eyes were a golden brown. She had a long face and her lips were curled into a grin. She watched the girl's eyes move up and down Jackie's face, shifting her gaze to Jackie's exposed cleavage in a way much more obvious than she probably should have. Jackie blushed and panicked a little too, they were in public, and Jackie might have come out to a handful of people she had known for years and trusted with her life, but this was next level.

The girl's eyes moved back up to Jackie's eyes, and she leaned over the bartop to speak to her, her cut off smashing pumpkins tee dipping down ever so slightly to expose her neck line. "What can I get for you, darling?" Her voice was low and seductive. This was all a little too much for Jackie, she didn't know what to say, and she pulled her eyes away to the front door, debating on cutting and running from it all before she noticed the pride flag hanging from the wall. Did she seriously stumble into a gay bar without knowing it? She laughed at herself and turned back around to the bartender, who was grinning too. "Yeah, baby, you're good here, promise."

Jackie just smiled and tried to stop the heat from spreading across her face, "Just a vodka cran, please."

The girl nodded at her and turned to make the drink. Jackie took the opportunity to survey the bar. It was relatively empty, not surprising considering it was a gay bar in the 1990s on a Wednesday night. It was a cool place. It was dark, and it smelled bad, but Jackie noticed two men around her age, holding hands at a booth not too far from her, laughing with each other, and she realized she was exactly where she needed to be. She had been wandering ever since Van and Tai left, hoping for some kind of community and safety, and she was hopeful that she might have found it.

The bartender interrupted her thoughts, "It's the only one in the city. It might seem dead now, but it gets pretty busy on the weekends. You'd be surprised."

Jackie realized she was having a hard time looking away from the girl's lips, so she downed her drink, asking for another.

The girl spoke as she poured, "What's your name? You look new."

Jackie laughed, inviting the buzz she was starting to feel and met her eyes, "It's Jackie. I just transferred to Rutgers, so I am new. Is it really that obvious?" Jackie was grateful she at least had the mind to keep up with the dates on her fake ID.

"You learn to get a sense for these things," the girl smiled at her again, 'I'm Renee.' She offered her hand, and Jackie shook it. "You're here a little early aren't you?"

“Yeah, a little... I’m doing some volunteer work. It’s the only way they’d let me move in early.”

“Ah, so you’re running from something then?”

“I like to think of it as running toward something,” Jackie was flirting. Leaning into this girl and giving her the eyes. It felt nice to be wanted, and not for some ulterior motive or even just a confusing one. Renee would not flirt with her the second she met her if she didn’t like her for the way she looked. It was clear, and it was obvious, and Jackie loved it. It seemed like Renee was flirting back too.

“Well then maybe you came to the right place.” She didn’t break eye contact as she refilled Jackie’s glass. Again, Jackie randomly felt a little overwhelmed. She broke eye contact and took a sip.

“Do you go to Rutgers then?” Jackie asked, trying her best to do it innocently.

“Yeah, just part time. I’m getting my masters in creative writing.”

“Oh nice, you managed to hit the lotto of part time jobs.”

“Yeah, I like it.” Renee got called to the other end of the bar by another customer, and smiled at her over her shoulder as she walked away. Jackie took another sip of her drink and cleared her throat. This could be okay, right? She could flirt, it didn’t mean she had to act on it. In a weird way it almost felt like she was cheating on Shauna, which she knew was ridiculous, but it felt good, and simple. Shauna wasn’t going to ruin this for her.

Jackie and Renee talked and flirted for a few hours before she managed to pull herself from the barstool. She tipped well and promised to come back soon before walking the half a mile back to her dorm. She got back, changed, set her alarm for the next morning and immediately fell asleep. It was the first time in a long time that she didn’t struggle to slip into sleep. She chose not to think about everything she left behind, and she realized she didn’t need to compulsively rehash it all every night.

Over the course of the semester, she became a regular at the gay bar, Triangles. She and Renee became acquaintances at first, and then friends who flirted and occasionally kissed if they were drunk enough, and eventually just friends with a little bit of tension that didn’t seem to draw Jackie in much. It didn’t feel right, and she didn’t really want her. She did eventually let her know that she was 18, and not 24 like it said on her ID, to which she got laughed at. Apparently it was obvious.

Everybody was too busy in the first semester getting settled in their new lives to visit at all, and Jackie couldn’t blame them. Her boss at the community center suggested that she major in marketing. She could do community outreach and communications all in one, combined with her constantly up to date knowledge of what’s popular and what the newest trends are to do something she could be really proud of every day. Jackie learned that she actually kind of liked school when it was something she cared about. Her entry level writing and math classes that were mandatory for every student were shaping up to look like Cs and Ds, but the classes she took inside her major were all A’s, something she was extremely proud of.

Thanksgiving break came along and Jackie chose to stay in her dorm. It seemed unnecessary to ask Van to drive all the way to campus and back twice for her to be home for 3

days, which was all she could get time off of her community outreach program for. So, Van and Tai made the trip to visit her from Friday to Sunday. The first thing Jackie did was take them to Triangle. Renee was working, and Jackie was excited to introduce everybody. Renee didn't change her behavior at Van and Tai's expense, and the tension and flirting that Jackie had thought was pretty tame, she realized was very not tame.

When Renee turned to get Van a beer, the two girls immediately turned to her with raised eyebrows. Van went first, "What was THAT?"

"What was what?" Jackie asked, avoiding eye contact and sipping on the drink that Renee had premade for her.

"Listen, you told us about this Renee girl... you did NOT tell us how down bad she was for you. That's a crazy detail to leave out." Van continued, "and I'm not pretending you weren't doing it right back either." Van wiggled her eyebrows suggestively.

Jackie laughed, "It's just a little fun, nothing that serious, really."

"Hey, she's hot, I wouldn't blame you," Van said.

Tai's eyes got big and she shot a shocked look at Van. Jackie laughed again and Tai turned back to her, "I mean... Jackie, she's like a black Shauna," Tai looked back at Van, who shrugged, apparently not surprised, "I mean, you guys have to see that right?"

Jackie was shocked, "What are you talking about?" Tai shot a look over her shoulder and Jackie turned back around to Renee bringing Van's beer, Tai's rum and coke and Jackie another vodka cran. Okay, yeah. Jackie could definitely see it. She thanked Renee for the drinks and pulled out her wallet to pay. Renee grabbed her hands and shook her head.

"It's on me, you guys are good tonight." Jackie smiled and thanked her again, to which she got a wink in return. She turned back around to meet eyes with Tai, and just gave her an eye roll and a knowing look before dragging them to the dance floor.

The weekend was beyond fun. Jackie hadn't realized how much she had genuinely missed the two of them. Van had convinced her to invite Renee over for them to get to know better on Saturday night, since she had the night off. Everybody got along really well, and Jackie was finally able to convince Van that there was nothing really going on. Just some innocent flirting. Tai wasn't as easily convinced.

Finals week flew by, and as she was spending her last week on campus before break, her boss at her volunteer work offered her a part time paid position, which she gratefully accepted. She was happy... or, she was getting happier, but her life still felt so off. It was weird, not knowing what Shauna was doing. She wanted so badly to know every detail of it. Did she like it at Brown? Was she lonely? Did she wish she had gone to Rutgers with Jackie instead? Had she found someone? She knew all she had to do was call Lottie and ask, but she just couldn't bring herself to admit that she wanted to know.

Tai was right about Renee, and ever since she mentioned it, the girl had gotten more attractive to Jackie. Her dark eyes, pouty lips that she used more often to smile, curly hair that perfectly framed her face. She was hot, Van was right, and it really gave her something to think about.

She felt pretty good about her finals, the important ones anyway, and her train to go back home left that Thursday night. She packed up everything she needed for the three weeks spent at home and made sure to say goodbye to Renee and a couple other regulars she had gotten to know at the bar before she left.

She spent the whole train ride home thinking about the possibility of seeing Shauna again. The itch to know how she was grew more and more with every day, and she settled on asking Lottie what she knew the second she got back. Again... she just couldn't help herself.

Chapter 18

Jackie returned home to the smell of her father's cigar and the sound of late night television. It was around 10:30, and her mother was definitely in bed, but her father seemed to be in his den. She knocked on the door and opened it to find him, cigar in hand, smiling at her.

"Jackie! It's good to see ya, hun. It's been ages!" He was clearly drunk, but it felt nice to hear it from him, so Jackie decided she'd take what she could get.

She smiled at him and gave him a hug, "Hi Daddy, I didn't want to bug you, just wanted to let you know I was home."

"Oh, Jackie sweetheart you could never bug me!" His statement was historically, not very accurate, but again, nice to hear, so. "Plus, we got to soak up this together time now, since your mom and I have that trip tomorrow."

Maybe she should have called home more often, because she had no idea what he was talking about, "What trip?"

"Our holiday trip, your mom told you about it, remember?" Oh god, maybe the issue wasn't just the frequency of calls but also her attention span during them. Whoops?

"Oh yeah... I must have forgotten. You're leaving tomorrow? When are you coming back?"

"First thing, of course. Flight leaves bright and early. We'll be back after the holidays." Her dad turned his attention back to the tv, disinterested now in the conversation.

"Like after New Years?" Jackie asked.

"Wouldn't be a holiday trip if we came back before the holidays, would it?" he really just mumbled it, and Jackie wasn't sure what she was really expecting, but she was still disappointed. She said goodnight and took her bags up to her bedroom.

Jackie had forgotten how empty it looked, but she cared less about it now. She had covered her dorm walls with photos of her weekend with Van and Tai, her nights at Triangle with her new friends, and that one picture of her Van and Tai that they took when they helped her pack up her room. She pulled the picture out of her bags and put it in its rightful place on her nightstand, unable to part from it.

The first thing she did was call Lottie. She knew her parents would be gone and that nobody would mind the late night call.

"Matthews residence, this is Charlotte," she answered, practiced and out of character.

"Hey, Lot. It's Jackie. No need for the customer service voice, please."

"Oh, hey! You're home!" Jackie smiled at the genuine excitement.

“Hi! I miss you so much! Turns out my parents are leaving tomorrow morning, so I was thinking the four of us can catch up a little bit? I brought some liquor back for us...”

“SO DOWN! Yes I will be there. You just prep, and I’ll make sure Tai and Van get there as early as possible tomorrow.”

“Yay! I’m so excited. Love you, Lot.”

“Love you too!” Jackie heard the line cut out and smiled to herself. For the first time, maybe in Jackie’s life, it felt good to be home.

She woke up and it was 10:30 am. She had slept in for the first time in a long time, and it felt nice to be in a bed big enough to be comfortable. Her parents must have left without waking her. She spent the morning making herself breakfast, eggs and toast, her usual, and put her Madonna CD in. She opened the windows, even though it was freezing cold outside, purely because her mother would never allow it. She liked the cold anyway.

By 5 pm everybody was there. Van had brought pizza and Tai had brought wine, claiming they needed to pregame the liquor, which Jackie didn’t entirely agree with but appreciated her energy anyway.

Lottie took the wine and poured them all out a glass, and Van beelined for the CD player, removing the Madonna CD from earlier and replacing it with the newest Smashing Pumpkins, which reminded Jackie to call the Triangle the next day to say hi to Renee like she promised.

“Okay, I need a whole breakdown... each of you, one by one, please.” Lottie demanded.

Van spoke up, “Well, I can go first, cause it’s pretty boring in Ohio, but I kind of fuck with it. There’s good movies and good music everywhere.” She shrugged.

“And you came to visit me... like four times, right? That’s probably pretty memorable, right?” Tai asked with a sarcastic laugh. Van shrugged again, trying to be nonchalant, and took a sip of her wine before completely losing her cool and laughing out loud. Tai continued, “Classes are hard, but good. It’s kind of fun to have a challenge. Pretty much everybody’s an asshole there, but there are a few people who I can tolerate enough to talk to in class. I tried out for the club soccer team, and that’s actually a really good outlet for me, but it kind of sucks playing without you guys. We could really use you, Jax.”

Jackie blushed at the compliment and continued the group update, “So, my volunteer thing is actually going to be paying me now! Which is so, so exciting.” The girls cheered and congratulated her, which she accepted graciously. “That and classes keep me pretty busy. I officially declared a marketing major, and it’s honestly really fun. I’m really liking it. Other than that I’m really just hanging out at my little gay bar, all grown up and shit.”

“Awee, Jax I’m so happy for you. It sounds like you’re doing really well,” Lottie took a sip and asked over the lip of the glass, “You still hanging around that Renee girl?”

Van didn’t even let her get a word out. “Bro, Lottie. They have this super tensioney vibe and they are DEFINITELY flirty. And she’s hot, too.”

Lottie’s jaw dropped and she turned to Jackie, surprised, “Ms. Taylor! You’ve been holding out on us!”

Again Jackie was cut off before she could even think of a response, “She is like Shauna’s fucking clone, Lot. Like if Shauna was black they could be twins.”

“No!” Lottie responded, head snapping from Tai to Jackie looking for an explanation.

“Come on, guys, you hung out with her, they’re not THAT similar.”

“Yeah, Jax. We hung out with her, and they are VERY similar, Renee just smiles more,” Tai shot back.

“Oh come on...” Jackie replied.

“Jackie, bro, she’s getting a masters in creative writing for fuck’s sake.” Van said, and to that, Jackie really had no response. There were a lot of similarities to be realized if she really thought about it.

She admitted defeat and just laughed, turning to Lottie to avoid further criticism. “Okay, okay... your turn, Lot.”

“It’s been really good, the psych classes right now are a lot of easy stuff, just basic lab work or whatever. Apparently the hard stuff comes later, so I will let you guys know. Nat and I are doing great! She’s working at a bar across the street from our apartment and she really likes it. She makes pretty good money and I get to see her all day, so that’s really nice.” Lottie paused and glanced up at Jackie before continuing, “We don’t have a bunch of friends, outside of you know, Shauna,” she looked at Jackie again.

“You don’t have to be weird about it, seriously. I’m fine. She’s your friend, I don’t want you to feel like you have to erase her.” It hurt a little bit to describe her as Lottie’s friend, and not Jackie’s best friend, but it hurt more right now to hear Lottie so unsure of herself, so she choked it down.

Lottie nodded and continued, “we don’t do a bunch of partying or anything, but sometimes we’ll have little get togethers. They’re pretty fun, I guess, but I’ve really missed you guys.”

The girls jumped up from where they were sitting and surrounded Lottie in a group hug full of ‘Awe’s and ‘I missed you too’s. When the girls broke apart, Van offered to make the real drinks now, which Jackie was for sure ready for. She made her way to the kitchen and Jackie turned back to Lottie, “Please don’t be weird about this... and don’t tell her I asked, but how is she?”

Jackie could feel the look on Tai’s face, but didn’t want to turn and acknowledge it. Lottie looked at her for a minute before responding, “She’s okay. She sits in it, you know, like wallows? Well of course you know. You know how she gets.” Jackie nodded, clearly looking for a little more than that.

“She journals a lot, but her classes are going really well. She really likes them.” Still not really what Jackie wanted to know, and she tilted her head, trying to convey that to Lottie without having to say it out loud.

“There’s no one else, Jax,” Lottie finally offered. Jackie nodded and there was a pause before Lottie continued, unsure, “She asks about you too, you know. I don’t think it’s weird to want to know, but I won’t tell her.”

That thought was a little reassuring, but also caused a wave of panic. She wondered if Shauna knew about Renee, or the gay bar. She wanted to know what Shauna thought about it. That's when Van came out with the drinks, breaking the silence.

Tai leaned over and whispered, "I'm a little unsure about her mixology skills. These drinks scare me a bit..."

"Hey! I heard that, and I will have all of you know, I am a GREAT mixologist," Van practically shouted, at which Tai sat up straight with a caught look on her face. The rest of the night was extremely fun. Jackie made sure to take more pictures to hang up on her wall, and she was happy, but her mind still raced with Lottie's words, she asks about you too. Jackie wasn't exactly surprised, but she felt herself needing to know again. How did she ask it? How often? What did she want to know? Why did she have to ruin everything? It ate at her until she was too drunk to remember what she was thinking about.

The girls danced and sang and had the most fun they had in a long time and eventually, all four of them passed out on the living room floor.

Chapter 19

The night before Jackie had to return to Rutgers, Laura Lee insisted everybody get back together for one last dinner at the local diner while they were all home, like old times, she had said. It was too hard to say no to her honestly, and Lottie wouldn't have been able to if she tried.

Tai came by to pick Jackie up and take her, apparently Van was going to meet them there. She had to stop home and see her mom for the day, something she had procrastinated all break, and Tai was using the opportunity to grill Jackie about how she was going to handle this little reunion.

"I'm gonna sit away from her, say nothing to her, and not get in the way of Lottie and Nat's thing. She's their friend, and I hate that Lot has to be awkward about that."

Tai nodded, "Okay, well if you need to bolt sooner than expected I've got like 6 excuses dialed up and ready." Jackie laughed.

"Seriously, Tai. I wouldn't want her to be alone anyway. I'm glad she has somebody she can talk to..."

"That's very mature considering the way you threw her out of your house 4 months ago," Tai said with a bit of snark and a grin.

"Well, maybe I've grown..."

"Or maybe you've got some recency bias." Jackie rolled her eyes, but honestly, she was a little nervous. It was hard to know how she was going to feel about it until she actually saw her.

Tai pulled into the parking lot, and Jackie could see everybody through the front window. "I guess we're gonna find out..."

Thankfully, they were late enough that Shauna, Lottie and Nat beat them there. Nat was at the end of the table, with Lottie sitting to her right. Shauna, who Jackie refused to let herself look at, was across the table from her, and there were three empty seats on Lottie's right hand side. Laura Lee stood up as soon as she saw them, and greeted them both with excited hugs. Next was Mari, and then unfortunately Misty, who Laura Lee couldn't help herself but invite. Tai casually mentioned she was saving the seat next to Lottie for Van, and took the next seat over, leaving the furthest possible seat from Shauna to Jackie.

Jackie sat down and ordered a drink and some food, Van had gotten there and done the same, all before she allowed herself to look at Shauna. When she did finally look up, she realized that Renee was absolutely nothing compared to Shauna. She felt a little bit angry that Tai felt they looked so similar. Renee was beautiful, but her eyes weren't nearly as deep and easy to sink into as Shauna's. Shauna's arms were toned and strong, where Renee's were slim and dainty. She had only gone a few months without seeing her, but she looked older, somehow. Tai kicked her under the table, and Jackie realized she was staring. She cleared her

throat and made casual conversation with Mari, pretending she couldn't feel the heat of Shauna's eyes on her.

Jackie didn't even really feel angry anymore, just sad. She missed her, and even worse, missed what they could have had. Jackie would have done absolutely anything for that future with Shauna she had dreamed of, all Shauna had to do was not completely betray her trust. But maybe it was better this way. Jackie got to find herself at school, meet Renee and the guys at the bar. She found a job she really enjoyed, and a major she felt really comfortable in, and best of all, found a family here that she never would have had otherwise. Maybe it was okay.

Dinner went well, there was never a reason for Jackie and Shauna to interact, Tai made sure of that, taking complete control of the situation, which Jackie thought was a little unnecessary, but still sweet, in Tai's own way. Afterward, they were all just sitting and talking, waiting for their bills and Van insisted the four of them all go back to Lottie's and finish off the liquor Jackie had brought back with her. Jackie agreed immediately, but Lottie gave Nat an unsure look. Nat stole a look at Shauna, who was deep in conversation with Laura Lee, and whispered to Lottie, "you guys can have fun, but I can't leave her alone. It would feel too wrong."

This was ridiculous. Had they been doing this all break? Strategically splitting time for Jackie's sake? Oh god, this was so wildly unnecessary. For the first time in months, Jackie turned to Shauna and spoke, "Shauna, you can say no, but we're thinking about going to Lottie's later to drink. You can come, if you want."

She watched Van and Lottie's eyes go wide as they silently turned toward her, shocked. Jackie didn't even look at Shauna once she had extended the invite and she turned to Tai, "you had that thing right? I'm good whenever."

"Yeah... yeah that thing. Thanks for setting this up Laura Lee, it was fun. Love you guys!"

Jackie set two twenty dollar bills on the table for her and Tai and got up, leading them both out of the restaurant.

"Well... that was unexpected," Tai said.

"I'm not in the same place that I was before. I can handle a few hours in a room with all of my friends and Shauna." All her friends... and Shauna, ouch.

"Okay, if you say so," Tai said. She started the car and backed out of the parking lot. Jackie got caught in brief eye contact with Shauna, and she felt a spark inside herself that she had forgotten about, one that ended just as fast as it came. She missed it, she realized. Maybe she could just be civil. Right?

Van showed up at Jackie's house less than 5 minutes later than Tai had pulled into the driveway. She must have had a 'thing' to deal with too. She walked right through the front door before asking, "So, you're like actually good with this? Cause you know she's definitely coming, right?"

Jackie laughed and rolled her eyes. What did they expect her to do? Spontaneously combust because she had stepped in the same room as Shauna? Have a complete breakdown?

“Van, babe. Seriously, I’m good. I swear, it will be fine. If I start to feel like shit I’ll just bug the hell out of you two. I promise.”

Van just nodded her head vigorously, noticeably nervous about the night. They decided that Tai could drive, so that Van and Jackie could pregame the fuck out of this and show up a little late, already having broke the tension. It seemed like a fantastic plan, and Jackie was grateful that Van had offered Tai up.

By the time they got to Lottie’s, Van and Jackie were leaning on each other stumbling through the door. Lottie laughed at them, and Tai disappeared with the bottles of liquor, claiming that she had some serious catching up to do.

“Look at Jackie fucking Taylor, providing the goods! Just as we had worked our way through Lottie’s only remaining bottle of cheap tequila.” Nat exclaimed.

“Oh good, yall got started... was starting to worry that slow-poke over there,” she motioned to Van, “would be holding you guys up.” Van faked being taken aback, gasping dramatically and throwing her hand over her chest.

“You know nothing could ever hold me back from some liquor,” Nat said. She was being much nicer than Jackie remembered. Strange.

Jackie looked at Shauna and felt the sudden urge to stand up straight. She felt her smile fade just a little at the look of her in those soccer shorts, legs sprawled out on the floor. The two girls made eye contact, and Shauna’s eyes looked carefree. She looked just as good as Jackie remembered. She was mid laugh and her lips were pulled wide. Jackie was a little infatuated when Tai came back with two shot glasses and pulled Jackie into the kitchen.

“No chance Van is gonna get three shots with you I don’t get one. So get your ass in here.”

Jackie laughed, recovering from her brain’s short circuit and downing a shot with Tai, not even flinching at the taste. Tai looked like she was going to choke on it, and Jackie laughed.

“Listen, you might be able to spend every night at the bar doing god knows what, but SOME OF US have to study and do things like homework, don’t make fun.”

Jackie laughed, “Don’t be upset because you can’t keep up anymore Turner...”

She watched Tai’s face change at the challenge, “Oh fuck you for that... pour out another.”

The second shot went down much cleaner, and they heard Van crank up the music from the other room and went running to see what they were missing out on. Apparently, they were missing out on Van’s live air guitar show, which was actually surprisingly pretty good, or maybe Jackie was just drunk.

They spent the night playing every new drinking game they had learned in their first semesters away, and got drunker and drunker as they went. Things started to slow down a bit around 2 or 3, when Shauna decided it was time for a bathroom break. The idea suddenly shrunk the bladders of Nat and Van too, and the three of them split between the basement, first floor, and second floor bathrooms. Jackie grabbed Lottie and Tai’s drinks, offering refills, and headed to the kitchen. She was sifting through Lottie’s fridge for cranberry juice when Shauna walked in.

“Oh, hi. Sorry... I was just looking for a refill...,” Shauna said, it was a little slurred but still awkward somehow.

Jackie smiled at her, making an effort to be friendly. “Yeah, go ahead, take what you need. Can’t do much until I find this cranberry juice anyway. Had to have been Tai who used it last...”

She felt Shauna behind her and watched her hand reach around and grab the juice out of the fruit cooler drawer. “It was Nat, she goes months without any fruits or like nutrition, so cranberry juice and drink mixers are about as close as it gets. Sorry.”

Jackie laughed and thanked her, grabbing the juice and turning to make her drink, trying to ignore the effect that Shauna’s closeness had on her. It was quiet, but not good quiet, awkward quiet.

“So... how’s Brown?” Jackie asked without looking up, trying to extend an olive branch or whatever, and ignoring the fact that Shauna had lied about even applying.

“Um... it’s good, you know. Different, but good I think,” she responded, ‘Thank you for asking,’ the second part came out quieter, more genuine, and Jackie looked up at her. She wore a soft expression and her eyes were absolutely entrancing. “How’s Rutgers? Did you end up finding a sorority you liked?”

Jackie knew that Shauna had to have known she never went that route, she was sure that would have been the first thing Lottie mentioned, but played it off anyway, “You know, I realized I never really wanted to do it in the first place,” Jackie said. She turned around and leaned her back on the kitchen island. She looked at Shauna, who was nodding her head, and realized that Shauna knew she never wanted to do it. How much did Shauna know about her that Jackie thought was so well hidden away?

She continued, pushing the thought away, “I’m working with event planning now for a community center. Started as volunteer work, but they want me part time now. I like it. It’s fun.”

“Good... good,” Shauna’s eyes were locked on hers now, and Jackie might have folded and initiated something she might regret if not for the memory of the last time they were in this kitchen together.

“Yeah...” was all Jackie could muster as she broke eye contact, grabbing the drinks and carrying them out to rejoin the party.

She walked in on Van turning on a movie and turning off the lights, and the party was over pretty much immediately after that. The only two left awake were Jackie and Van.

“Hey...” Van whispered over a sleeping Tai, “Are you okay? Didn’t mean to leave you in there by yourself.”

Jackie shrugged and held her hand up in a wavering so-so hand signal. She was good, she had a good night, but again, Shauna was just so immensely complicated. They had a good talk. It was small talk, but Jackie wasn’t yelling or crying or drinking excessively and Shauna wasn’t snapping at her or getting defensive, which for them was kind of a win. It was just a lot, really. Not bad, not good, just a lot. Van nodded and seemed to get it almost immediately,

and reached over Tai to grab Jackie's hand. She turned back to the movie but ran her thumb over Jackie's until Jackie was able to drift off into a deep sleep.

When she woke up, Shauna and Nat had already left, and Van was in the bathroom comforting a puking Tai. Lottie was up eating a bowl of yogurt and granola on the couch.

"Good morning," Jackie said slowly.

Lottie smiled at her, "Good afternoon, sunshine."

Jackie chuckled and sat up, rubbing her eyes and enjoying a few minutes of quiet before finally getting up. "Hey, was that really okay? It wasn't awful for you?" Lottie asked.

"No, Lot, it was fine. I mean not something I want to do all the time, but I had fun," Jackie said. Lottie didn't look convinced, and Jackie rolled her eyes playfully, "It wasn't totally awful for me, promise."

Lottie broke into a smile at that and nodded her head, accepting the promise. Eventually, Tai and Van made their way out to join the other girls, and they procrastinated their goodbye for as long as possible, but it was time. Jackie had convinced Van that she didn't need to drive her back to campus, and insisted that the bus would be good for her to clear her head. It took a while, but Van ended up allowing it as long as Jackie promised to let her drive her to the station. They said their goodbyes, and Jackie tried her best not to cry. She really was going to miss them. They planned a trip up to Columbia to visit Tai half way through the semester, and then made plans for spring break to go see Lottie, despite the four hour drive and the unspoken baggage that campus had living on it. Regardless, Jackie was excited at the idea of seeing them again, and it was nice to be able to count down the days. She got on the bus with that in mind and tried to ignore the thought of Shauna's eyes the whole way back to campus.

Chapter 20

Jackie dropped her bags in her room and immediately started to get ready to head to Triangle. She promised Renee she'd head over the second she got back. She wasn't working tonight, and they could have fun together and more importantly, use her employee discount. Jackie put on black leather pants and a long sleeve top that cut open to reveal her cleavage. She put on a red lip and some tame eyeshadow and started her walk to the bar. It was cold as fuck, and she didn't usually make this walk without some kind of pregame liquor in her. It seemed like it took forever, but finally she opened the front door and found Renee behind the bar, despite it being her off night.

"Jackie!" Her face lit up, and Jackie returned the excitement. Renee poured out a vodka cranberry for her and ran around the bar to bring it to her. She was clearly already a little tipsy, because she spilled a few drops of her drink as she wrapped her arms around Jackie.

"Hey, babe! I missed you so much!" Jackie said, squeezing her back with the same excitement. She took the drink from Renee and took a sip. "Oh my god this is so much better than the drinks Van's been pouring out for us all break."

"You let that girl pour your drinks? That's terrifying!"

"Yeah, Tai said the same thing, but stronger isn't always a bad thing, I guess. Made me more of a sipper and less of a shooter," Renee laughed at the joke and grabbed on to Jackie's arm to hold herself up.

"Come on baby, you gotta catch up to me," Renee led her to the bar and poured out two shots.

Jackie lifted one of the glasses and raised it to cheers the other girl, but Renee just shook her head. "Oh, no. Both for you bitch."

Jackie downed one and then another before chasing it with her vodka cran. She shook her head and immediately felt the warmth of the liquor spread through her chest. She grabbed Renee and ran to the dance floor. The music was loud, and preppier than normal. She wondered if Renee queued it up for her, knowing she'd be coming back tonight. They had talked a couple times over break, and it was clear that without Jackie there, all Renee really had to do was her job, which she definitely liked, but it made Jackie a little sad for her. They had a couple regulars at the bar that they drank with and talked to while they were there, but it never went much further than that. They weren't exactly close friends.

Renee spun Jackie around as they danced to the music, Jackie sang along loudly, and probably badly, too, but Renee didn't seem phased. As the night went on, they danced closer and closer, until they were eventually pressed chest to chest. Renee turned Jackie around again and she started to dance with her ass pressed against Renee's front. Jackie liked being this close to her. It felt good to be touched and wanted. Renee's hands wrapped around her waist, helping her move with the music. It was so fun and carefree, she could just dance and laugh and sing and it could mean nothing.

Jackie threw her head back and laughed, looking over her shoulder at Renee. She really was so pretty. Jackie turned around, wrapped her arms around the girl's shoulders and kissed her. It wasn't the first time they had kissed drunk, but it was the first time they had made out. Renee deepened the kiss, and Jackie slipped her tongue inside Renee's mouth, pulling her in harder with her arms. Renee returned the gesture and moaned into Jackie's mouth, grabbing her hips and holding her close. It wasn't a soft kiss, but hard, and fast. It was messy, and Jackie could taste the tequila on Renee's tongue, but it was hot. Jackie loved the feeling of it. Renee yelled into her ear over the music, "Need another drink?" Jackie nodded and mouthed the words thank you toward her as she walked away. She was grateful that the two of them could just have fun and it could mean absolutely nothing.

The night went on probably a few hours too long, and by the time they wrapped it up there was absolutely no chance Renee was making it back to her apartment 2 miles away. The two girls walked the half mile back to Jackie's dorm together, stumbling and laughing the whole way. They crashed together onto the small futon Jackie could fit into her dorm and Renee turned to look at her.

"I like this..." she said.

"Yeah, me too," Jackie smiled softly at her, "but I like how it is now. I can't like, do anything serious or anything like that... at least not right now."

Renee let her eyes linger on Jackie's face, "I know, babe. I like how it is now too." Jackie nodded.

"I just want to be able to talk about it too. I don't want to have to wonder what's going on. I like having fun. I like that it doesn't mean anything."

"We can talk about it whenever you want to. I just didn't want to spook you. I didn't want you to think I wanted something more than you wanted to give and screw anything up." Jackie was grateful for her honesty. It was refreshing. She nodded and Renee continued, "You might be my closest friend in this town, Jack. I would never ruin that." Jackie smiled.

"Yeah, same."

"Does that mean we can talk about it then?"

"Talk about what?"

"Whatever it is that's making you not want anything more serious than this. I mean, it's not like girls at the bar don't hit on you. You're hot, and you're fun. You could get a date with anybody who walks through the door. Why don't you want that?"

Jackie paused, she hadn't ever talked about Shauna to someone who didn't know Shauna. She was worried that Renee would think she was awful. It was weird that she was worried about it, and she knew that, but that's just where her mind went. She chose her words carefully. "The last time I wanted that... it didn't exactly go well." Renee nodded, wanting her to continue.

"I've been in love with my former best friend for my entire life. I did everything I could to pretend I wasn't, I did all the right things. I dated the hottest and nicest guy in my grade. I managed myself and put on this persona, it was miserable, honestly. We started having sex — me and Shauna I mean... and then we would just pretend it didn't happen. Which, like once,

is probably pretty standard or whatever, but I'm talking about a week. It went on for so long that I thought I was losing my mind, making it all up. Shauna didn't even flinch when I'd try to get a reaction from her, it was seriously like it never happened. I needed answers. I needed to know how she felt about everything, so I read her journal."

Renee's eyes got big and she must have read the look on Jackie's face because she immediately said, "No, sorry! Not judging, just surprised. Continue."

"I know it was wrong, breach of privacy and all that. I just needed to know. I needed to be able to protect myself if I needed to, and I wasn't ever gonna tell her I had done it. But she wrote about fucking my boyfriend." Renee gasped, covering her mouth with her hand. Jackie laughed and kept talking, "It stung, seriously I was a mess for weeks. Still am, to a certain extent. She was supposed to be my roommate here, but she applied to other schools behind my back. I had asked her directly about it like a week prior and she just lied right to my face. The worst part was, we had sex every single day from when we started to that day I read her journal, and she had fucked my ex in that span of time. She woke up next to me in bed, I left because I had plans with my mom and she went to his place. I met back up with her that night and we had sex. I had no idea." Another gasp.

"That's fucking horrible oh my god."

Jackie nodded, "It killed me. I don't think I would have made it through without Van, Tai and Lottie. They seriously saved my life."

"Well thank god for them... so you guys just don't speak now, then?"

"Yeah... Well, we didn't for a while. The problem is that Lottie is dating Shauna's only friend. We all live in the same hometown. I felt bad that they had to be like splitting time between the two of us. Lottie and Shauna go to the same school, they spend a lot of time together. It felt childish to just pretend they didn't. I talked to her for the first time yesterday. It was weird, but it was fine, I guess." Jackie looked down at her shoes, suddenly feeling very sober.

"Are you over it?" Renee asked.

Jackie smiled, "I'm not sure I ever will be, but I'm trying to be. I want to be, I think." She was ignoring the spark she felt, ignoring the way it felt to be lost in her eyes. She had to ignore it, because wanting her wasn't healthy. Renee nodded and wrapped her arm around Jackie's shoulders. Jackie rested her head on the girl's shoulder and took a deep breath, suddenly realizing how tired she was. They fell asleep like that for about 30 minutes before Jackie woke up, wildly uncomfortable. She covered Renee in a blanket and made her way to her bed, changing into a pair of old shorts and big T-shirt and setting her alarm for her first day back at work. She dropped into bed and fell asleep immediately.

Chapter 21

The first few weeks of the semester went by quickly. Having gotten most of the prerequisite classes out of the way, Jackie was able to focus just on her marketing classes. She was cramming to get as much of it done as possible before Van picked her up and drove her up to NYC to visit Tai. She was caught up, which wasn't something her classmates could say, but she wanted to be ahead so that she wouldn't have to worry about anything while she was out of town.

She felt pretty good about it all by the time Van got to her dorm. She let her in, scrambling to get the rest of her statistics report written as Van explored the dorm room.

"Wow, Taylor... It's kind of a mess in here."

Jackie rolled her eyes and laughed under her breath, "It's super nice to see you too, Van."

"Yeah, yeah, yeah, whatever." Van laughed and then looked over her shoulder at her computer to see what she was working on. "That looks like it sucks."

"It does." Jackie wrote the last sentence she needed, saved the document and decided to leave the proofreading till Monday. She turned and smiled at Van, "Ready?"

"YES PLEASE! I'm gonna need a soda or something though before we get on the road... any good gas stations around here?"

Jackie grabbed her bag and raced to follow Van out the door. She was beyond excited. She missed her friends, and could really use some good quality time. Jackie tried her best to keep Van entertained on the drive, but she had damn near pulled an all-nighter the night before and she was exhausted. She couldn't stop herself from drifting off in the passenger seat, completely knocked out until Van parked in the Columbia campus parking garage.

"Morning sunshine. Ready to head up?"

"Oh, god. I'm sorry Van, I really was trying to stay up."

"You're good, Jax. I could tell you were really working for it." She laughed and grabbed her own backpack out of the backseat, grabbing Jackie's duffle too. Jackie tried to grab it from her and was shooed away. Van just motioned instead to the elevators in the garage. 'They lead right up to the dorm room, Tai gave me a spare key so we shouldn't have an issue.' Apparently, she had gotten into the honors dorms, which meant she didn't have a roommate either, which Van seemed very pleased with. "She's got class for another 15 minutes, so we can just chill until then."

When Jackie walked in, she realized that while she had never really thought about what Tai's dorm room would look like, it was exactly this. Everything was more organized and polished than Jackie knew was possible. "Wowza..." was all Jackie was able to muster. Van laughed and tossed their bags on the couch, sprawling out on Tai's carefully made bed and almost immediately falling asleep. Jackie took her time wandering around the room, looking at the pictures. You would have never been able to tell that a year ago Jackie wasn't even

really friends with Tai and Van. She smiled to herself and sat down on the couch, pulling out the magazine she had intended to flip through on the drive.

Tai keyed into the room sweaty and disheveled like she had run there from her classroom. “Slow down, killer, we weren’t gonna leave ya,” Jackie said when she saw her. She stood up and gave Tai a massive hug.

“I was excited, don’t make fun!” Tai said.

Tai woke Van up and gave her a hug and kiss. “Excited to see me, huh?”

“Jackie got to nap in the car and I didn’t. A power nap wasn’t gonna hurt anybody.” Tai laughed and pulled her up off the bed. “I’ve got plans, so no more naps. Everybody up!”

Tai took them to the street corner to get apparently the best pizza on campus. It was surprisingly fantastic. The girls walked 15 minutes to central park and found themselves on a trail for over an hour. Jackie was not at all surprised that Tai loved it here, but she hadn’t worked out once since their last soccer game, so her legs were definitely feeling it. Luckily for her, Van bailed out first and they headed back to the dorm room to do what they did best... drink. Tai explained that they should go out tomorrow night, since it was pride night at the bar, and that’s when Lottie would be able to join them anyway. They agreed and decided it would be nice to stay in and catch up.

They sat down, drinks in hand and Tai turned to Van, “Did you tell her?”

Jackie looked at them confused and Van said, “No I didn’t get the chance to before she passed out in the passenger seat. I’m not kidding, Tai it couldn’t have been any more than 5 minutes from campus.” Tai laughed, but Jackie was eager to know the secret.

“Tell me what??? Fill me in, come on!”

Tai and Van looked at each other, smiling, “I’m moving in here!!”

“Oh my god! Really?” Jackie said, excited as all hell for them.

“Yes! Ohio’s fun and all, but it just made no sense. I love it here, honestly, and I was driving more than I was staying in one place. I realized this is just where I want to be.” She looked at Tai and smiled sweetly.

“Oh my god, guys! Congratulations! I’m so happy for you guys, seriously.” Jackie could not have been more thrilled. At first, she agreed with Van, thinking that New York might be a little too pretentious for her, but after Tai’s tour around the city, she could definitely see Van fitting in here. The importance of film and music in the city was evident, and in a way, perfect for Van.

“Thank you, thank you. We’re both super excited about it,” Tai said. “So... what’s new with you?”

“Nothing, really. Just classes and work. They’ve both been so busy, seriously.”

“And Renee?” Van asked.

“Oh, that’s pretty much the same too. Well... I guess we did make out. We kind of... do make out. But we talked about it, it’s completely casual. Neither of us wants to change that,

and I'm extremely happy with where it's at."

"Oh? You make out like... currently?" Tai asked, to which Jackie nodded, hiding her face with her glass, trying not to be too shy about it, but honestly she was a little embarrassed. She was comfortable with it at school, when nobody knew her history, but it felt like with Tai and Van, who knew how hopelessly in love with Shauna she was, it was just a little childish. Jackie knew they didn't see it that way, but still.

"Like... often?" Van followed up.

"I mean... define often"

"Once a week? I guess?"

"I'd say like once or twice, yeah."

Tai's jaw dropped, "Look at you, Taylor! I didn't think you had it in you!"

"Didn't think I had what in me?" Jackie asked.

Tai looked at Van before responding, it was clear they had talked about this before, "You know... moving on. It's good. I'm proud, honestly."

Moving on. That was what she was doing right? It was good, right? Jackie didn't know why, but that phrase didn't seem to fit how she felt. How could she explain that, though? So she just nodded, "Thanks, Tai. I appreciate you."

The rest of the night was relatively uneventful. Everybody was exhausted from the long day and they all crashed before midnight. The next morning, they woke up to Lottie's knock at the door. Jackie was on the couch and Tai and Van were still in bed, fast asleep. Jackie got up and opened the door. She was practically mauled by Lottie, who picked her up and spun her around.

"AHHHHH, Jackie it's so good to see you!"

"You too, Lot! I've missed you!!!"

That was enough to wake Van and Tai up, and if it wasn't, Lottie's run and jump into their bed definitely was. The three of them hugged and Lottie wasted no time getting all cozy in their bed. Van waved her arms at Jackie to join them, and the four of them spent the morning bed rotting and catching up with Lottie. As expected, Van spilled Jackie's tea before Jackie even really got a chance. Jackie managed to get her back by telling Lot that Van was moving in, so at least they were even.

Lottie had been doing really well, the hard classes apparently still hadn't hit her, which seemed a little surprising to Jackie, who thought maybe Lottie was just good at them. Her and Nat were happy, and Nat had agreed to leave her mom's place over the summer and just move into the Matthew's mansion, since Lottie's parents were moving to Greece until further notice. Lottie didn't make Jackie ask this time for a more detailed update, and she was grateful for it. She turned to Jackie, addressing only her, and said, "She's doing a lot better. I think you guys being friendly did a lot for her. She still journals more than anyone known to man, and she definitely has her days, but she's made some friends, I think. She doesn't say much about them, but she hasn't been living with us as much." Jackie tried to hide her disappointment. She wanted Shauna to have friends, right? That's what she said. It's what she

thought... but really, Jackie was realizing she wanted Shauna to have friends that she knew. More specifically, friends that she knew didn't want her.

"Earth to Jackie..." Tai waved her hand back and forth in front of Jackie's face, laughing.

"Oh sorry... need coffee, please. ASAP."

"Yeah, sure... that's it." Van said with a grin and an eye roll as she stood up to make some. Thankfully, everybody pretty much dropped it. Tai went to join Van in the kitchen and left Jackie and Lottie in the bed.

"Do you want me to keep the Renee stuff a secret?" Lottie asked. She looked like she wasn't even sure if she should be asking the question.

"You don't need to keep any secrets for me, Lot. I'm really not stressed about it."

"Okay. I just wanted to make sure. She asks sometimes... you know, if there's somebody at Rutgers. I just never know what to say. I've been telling her that I didn't really know. That nobody you mentioned stood out when you called."

"I appreciate it, Lot. It really is okay though, it's not much of a secret to keep. We're not having sex or anything."

"Well... still. I think it's nice, Jax. It's good for you to have somebody like that. Somebody that gets it, you know?"

Jackie smiled at her genuinity. "Yeah, I do. I know I haven't always been Nat's biggest fan, but I'm really glad you guys are doing so well. I couldn't be more thrilled that you're happy. If Nat's what does it for you, consider me completely on board."

Lottie hugged Jackie tightly, "Thank you, Jax. I love you."

"Love you too, Lot."

The smell of coffee made Jackie pull away.

"Oh, Van, what a gentleman. I could get used to this delivery service!" Jackie said.

"You can get the trial but she's mine full time now, so don't get used to it," Tai responded, trailing close behind her, wrapping her arms around the girl's waist from behind and leaning into the side of her neck.

The day couldn't have been more perfect. Tai took them all to the museum. Something she was waiting on Lottie for, knowing that Jackie and Van would like it, but Lot would LOVE it. Jackie had never seen the girl more excited, which was kind of saying something considering her entrance that morning. They had cheap brunch at a little deli tucked away in some sketchy looking alley, but the sandwiches might have been the best Jackie had ever had. It was very clear that Tai knew her way around this city, despite how massive it seemed. It was really cool to see Tai completely in her element. It was clear this is where she was destined to be. Columbia couldn't have been a better place for her.

They went out to pride night and it was completely packed. The cover was ridiculously expensive, and left Jackie homesick for Triangle, but it was fun, and the drinks were complicated and amazing. Jackie seemed to draw a decent amount of attention, and she

refused to turn it away. She danced with anybody who asked and had what might have been the most fun of her life. Eventually, her ability to meet new people dwindled and she found Tai and Van, who seemed happy about the alone time Jackie had given them, and Lottie who was sat at the bar small talking with the steady rotation of people all night. They danced until the club closed at 3 am and walked back drunk and giggly to Tai's room. Life always seemed so much better when it was just the four of them. Jackie was in no way ready to leave when it came time, but Van was on a tight schedule if she wanted to make it back to Ohio before midnight. Apparently, she was staying there until the week before spring break so that her uncle could find somebody to replace her in the shop and then she was completely moving into Tai's dorm. She was almost giddy with excitement about it, and Jackie loved her for it. She loved the two of them. Van and Tai were perfect for each other, and watching them actually living this life that Jackie didn't think would ever be possible left Jackie with a sense of pride.

Jackie made sure she kept herself up for the entirety of the second drive, still feeling guilty for how quickly she fell asleep the first time. They sang and talked and gossiped the whole way back to Rutgers, and Jackie had tears in her eyes saying goodbye. When she got back to her room, she immediately got back to work on her report, now having fallen behind to being caught up on her assignments. She needed to work a little harder tonight to be ahead for the week, which was the only way she'd be able to go see Renee the next night. New York was nice, but Triangle just seemed like home for Jackie, at least for right now.

Chapter 22

Jackie spent the next few weeks in a comfortable routine. Renee had been working more to try to save up for a summer trip to Jackie's hometown in a few months, so the routine was pretty much work, class, homework, Triangle, her and Renee crash in her dorm room, repeat. It was busy, but fun. Jackie and Renee... were hard to describe. From the outside, it probably seemed like denial or like something was going to be messy, but the two of them both knew that it never could be. It just simply didn't have the potential to be anything romantic. They just didn't operate that way. Jackie didn't think she had it in her after everything with Shauna anyway. There was nothing gentle about it, nothing intimate or lovey-dovey, it was as platonic as two gay girls who kiss could get, which was probably the perfect thing for Jackie right now.

Before she knew it, it was spring break, and it was much needed. However, Jackie had been avoiding the fact that she was pretty much definitely going to see Shauna this weekend, and she definitely hadn't come to terms with what that meant to her. She had actually spent more time than she would care to admit trying to forget the way Shauna looked at her over winter break, or the fact that she had been spending time with friends Lottie didn't know anything about now. The feeling made her extremely uneasy, and she was honestly just really hoping she'd be lucky enough to avoid her all week.

Jackie took the bus an hour up to Columbia, having saved up for the fare and the definite expenses she assumed the week would bring. She had purposefully left out her now paying job to her parents, so that they would continue to send her monthly checks to keep her afloat while she's away. She figured it was the least they could do considering the lack of involvement or interest they shared in Jackie's life. When she arrived on campus, Tai seemed eager to get out.

"So burn out got to even you, huh?" Jackie teased.

"It's not burn out. I still love it. I'm just tired," Tai said with a laugh.

Van ushered them into her car and they started their three hour trek up to Lottie and Nat's place. When they got there, Nat was at work and Shauna was nowhere to be seen, which was like Jackie's best case scenario. They greeted Lottie with excitement that never seemed to run out and the week got kicked off right away. They went to the bar Nat worked at to say hi and she lined up a round of free shots for the group, starting them off right. Nat's bar wasn't exactly meant for dancing or anything like that, so they stayed to pregame and ended up heading next door to really start their night. As the only single friend, again Jackie got a lot of attention, and she was a little more reigned in now, but still didn't stop herself from having fun. It was just dancing. She danced with girls, guys, her friends, everybody. It didn't need to mean anything, which was something she had learned from Renee.

At the end of the night, she was exhausted. They headed back to Nat's to say goodnight and get some cheap and easy bar food Nat made up just for them, regardless that the kitchen had closed hours before. They left the bar with a quick, 'love you' to Nat and went right to

bed. Jackie gave Tai and Van the couch to share and made a bed with blankets on the floor below them.

They spent the week essentially just repeating that night over and over again. Lottie gave them the little tour around town, and four days into their six day trip, Jackie hadn't seen Shauna once. Jackie was wearing a black dress that was tight in all the right places and hung just low enough on her chest to attract a glance from Van. That's how Jackie knew it was perfect. They made their nightly trip to Nat's. The four of them walked in like they owned the place, and Jackie immediately saw Shauna at the bar. Her back was turned to them, but Jackie would recognize her anywhere. She was wearing a black skirt, short enough to expose the definition of her thighs, and a tank top with a flannel over it. Her hair was straight, and she looked amazing enough to make Jackie stop in her tracks. As soon as Tai noticed she was there, she looked at Jackie trying to read whether or not this was okay, but Jackie didn't even have it in her to look away. She had seen Shauna in every possible outfit, every possible state, but not for SO long. She looked beautiful.

Tai turned to Lottie next, "Lot, come on. Did you know she'd be here tonight?" Lottie looked panicked at the accusation, clearly clueless about the whole thing and unsure of what to say to defend herself.

Van cut in, "She lives here, Tai. Is she just supposed to not go to the bar because we're in town?"

The conversation caught Jackie's attention and she finally peeled her eyes away from Shauna. Maybe this is why her friends panicked anytime they happened to run into each other. "Guys, it's cool. I could use a shot, but I'm good."

Lottie seemed relieved at her words and she said, "I can definitely make that happen. Want two?" Jackie nodded her head enthusiastically and the two girls made their way to the bar, leaving a shocked Tai and Van behind them. This would be good, right? Just attack it head on.

"Natty baby! How's business tonight?" Lottie said, using a pet name that anybody else might actually get murdered for using. Nat smiled, it was kind of weird to see her respond to it, but if there was an exception to her rule, it would be Lottie, Jackie supposed.

"Hey, Shauna. Good to see you." Jackie offered a tight lipped smile as she waited for Shauna's reaction. She seemed shocked that she was there, and stumbled over her words as she looked Jackie up and down. That look in her eyes made Jackie squirm a little, which Shauna must have noticed and took it as a sign to come back to Earth.

"Hey— hi, Jackie... you look— I didn't know you were coming tonight, sorry I didn't mean to crash your plans."

"No, Shauna you're good. We're just here to pregame, and it's your turf anyway, so no worries." Shauna nodded and went back to staring at her. There was a very awkward silence that followed, as apparently Lottie and Nat were just watching it all go down.

Jackie cleared her throat at Lottie, who snapped out of it and said to Nat, "3 shots of vodka, please. Nat nodded and turned around to grab the bottle.

Jackie couldn't handle the silence anymore, so she turned back to Shauna. "Are you headed next door too tonight?"

“Oh no, not really my scene, you know. I usually just keep Nat company.” Jackie nodded, unsure of what to say next, and thankful for Nat bringing the shots to the bar top as a distraction from the very weird energy that was sitting between Shauna and her. She took the first one with Lottie, and the second alone, shaking her head at the taste.

Jackie turned around to Tai and Van finally catching up with them, seemingly having watched from afar. Van said hey to Shauna and Tai nodded, not making the awkwardness of the situation much better, and Tai immediately said, “Y’all ready to head next door?” to which Jackie cheered and took the opportunity to practically run away from whatever that situation was.

The same as the nights before, they danced, they sang, they laughed. Jackie found a couple cute straight girls who seemed interested in maybe testing the waters and Jackie wasn’t going to tell them no. She was completely wrapped up in the moment, the music, the feeling of another woman on her body when the hair on her neck stood up, like an electric charge just entered the room. Jackie turned her and the girl around in a 180 to see Lottie talking to Shauna at the bar. Lottie was talking, and Shauna was not responding. Her eyes were locked on Jackie. Just her body at first, and the body of the girl she was with, but as soon as Jackie turned, Shauna’s eyes were on hers and it was like there was nothing else in the world. That fucking look, again. It was primal, it was wanting and needy. It was fucking angry, and it was sexy. It was so, so sexy. Jackie didn’t let it stop her, and in her very drunken state she made a decision that she probably wouldn’t have while sober, and she turned the girl around so that her ass was pressed up against Jackie. Jackie maintained eye contact with Shauna for the remainder of the song, smiling at her, watching the look grow deeper and deeper.

Shauna fucking WANTED her. She came here, to this bar, for HER. Jackie loved it. She loved knowing that Shauna still felt that way about her, and she wanted to drive it as far as she could. She wanted to push her buttons and see how she reacted. But she didn’t react. She never fucking reacted. Her eyes got darker, her jaw was set, but she just sat down next to Lottie who had long given up on whatever conversation she was trying to have and just watched. After a few minutes, Jackie felt Van pressed up behind her. She snapped out of her daze and smiled, leaning into her, letting go of the other girl completely. She felt Van’s hands on her shoulders, pulling her to face her and Van said, “Unless you’re wanting some kind of confrontation or conversation about whatever that was... you need to chill out.” Jackie played dumb and just shrugged, to which Van said, “You’re gonna thank me for this tomorrow... let’s go find Tai.” Jackie knew she was right, so she followed her, looking back at Shauna one more time before losing her in the crowd.

That was the last thing Jackie remembered before waking up on Lottie’s couch the next morning. She groaned and was immediately presented with a plate of bacon and eggs. She gratefully accepted and her stomach thanked her for it. “How the fuck did I get here?”

“You walked, mostly,” Tai said with a laugh, “until you didn’t anymore... then I carried you.”

“Ugh... sorry.”

“Oh it’s okay, you were entertaining. How much do you remember?” Van asked. Jackie looked up. It was just the three of them in the apartment.

She thought for a moment, “Oh god, I was a dick wasn’t I?”

“Oh 100%, but I think you got your point across, babe,” Van answered her.

Jackie groaned again, rubbing her face with her hands before looking at Van, “Shauna was there. You probably saved me from completely blowing up our spring break trip... yeah that’s all I got.”

“Honestly, better than expected. We left like a half hour after that, and it was a pretty tame half hour, so you’re good,” Tai said.

“Where’s Lottie at?”

“Getting breakfast with Nat. They’re on a date or whatever, left us a note because apparently they were both up before 9. Which is crazy, by the way.”

“That’s kind of cute though... I love that.” Jackie said. She sat up and realized how in need of a shower she was and made her way there. She took her time getting ready for the day, dreading this inevitable conversation with Lottie that was coming as soon as she was dressed. Regardless how long she pushed it off, it came the very second she walked out of the bathroom.

“Hey Jackie, how are you feeling?” Lottie asked. The two of them were alone in the kitchen.

“I’m good. A lot better than I thought, honestly.”

“I just wanted to check in, you know...”

“Yeah, I kind of figured you would.” Jackie laughed and looked at the floor, “I’m sorry if I put you in a weird position or anything last night. I really didn’t mean to.”

“Oh, Jackie, no. You didn’t. Shauna said she wasn’t going to the club, you did nothing outside of what you would any other time, she came anyway, and made it awkward. I was going to apologize on her behalf!” Oh. Jackie could acknowledge that was generally what happened, but she wasn’t blameless, and she knew that. She wasn’t going to mention it, though.

“No, Lot. I was honestly just worried about you feeling awkward. You know that’s the absolute last thing I want. It’s her home, not mine. I can’t be upset about her going to a bar.”

“Oh good! I’m so glad you feel that way. I’m sorry for even bringing it up, I must’ve just been reading into things.”

That was all the conversation really needed to be, and Jackie was grateful for that. That night, their last night, was spent in their dorm room. Nat had the night off, and the girls agreed that she shouldn’t have to spend the night in a bar if she didn’t want to. She offered to go over to Shauna’s for the night to give them some alone time, but that felt ridiculous. It was her home, they weren’t gonna kick her out.

“Okay... but, I don’t know that I want to just blow Shauna off either. We made plans...” Nat said.

Jackie got a little excited at the idea that she could tell her to invite Shauna, and the girl would be here in less than an hour. She probably should’ve taken her excitement as a sign that it was a bad idea, but she wanted to see her. She wanted to be in the same room as her again.

She was addicted to it. “Just invite her, Nat. All week you’ve been keeping her away. I appreciate it, but you guys gotta believe me when I say I’m good. We were fine over break, weren’t we?”

Nat paused and looked at Lottie for an opinion, who said, “she did seem better after they talked...” which seemed to be enough for Nat, who beelined for their phone to invite her.

Shauna walked through the door and Jackie immediately felt it again. She had soccer shorts and a Brown University hoodie on and even in the most basic of clothes she looked amazing. Her hair was pulled back into a ponytail, exposing her neck and her collarbones. It took everything Jackie had not to stare, but Shauna didn’t hold back. She was staring.

The girls settled in with some very light drinks, except for Van, who had insisted on finishing off the liquor she had brought for the week, and started playing never have I ever. It was Tai’s turn, “Never have I ever gone more than two days without showering.” Typically, Jackie would never, but her little depressive episode while she was living at Lottie’s did her in, and she took a drink with everybody else in the room.

Jackie was up next, “Never have I ever pretended to be sick to get out of work.” She liked it, why would she? That got everybody except for Tai and Lottie, who had never had a real job. Lottie was up next.

“Never have I ever kissed a boy.” She looked pointedly at Nat, who drank. Jackie drank too, glancing up at Shauna as she did too, remembering their history and Jeff very vividly.

Nobody else seemed to notice, and Nat was next, “Never have I ever made out in a bar.”

Van looked at Lottie, “Seriously?”

Lottie just shrugged, “We’re not big into PDA.” Jackie took a drink, thinking of all her nights with Renee at Triangle. She looked up and saw Shauna notice, and that look was back in her eyes. She was jealous. Jackie glanced at Tai to see if she was paying attention to all this too. She was.

Shauna was up next. “Never have I ever ordered somebody else a drink at a bar.” Everybody drank and nobody really questioned it, but again Shauna’s eyes were glued to Jackie.

It was Van’s turn, which was a little terrifying considering she was sloppy drunk at this point, “Hmmmmmm. I don’t know. Never have I ever... brought a bartender home after her shift.” Fucking Christ. She said it with a wink directed at Lottie and Nat, seemingly unaware of the effect that might have on Jackie. Jackie saw Tai’s eyes get big, and she kicked Van hard enough to make her realize how dumb that was of her to say, and she shot Jackie an apologetic look as Jackie took a sip. She didn’t dare look at Shauna, and Lottie cleared her throat, advising that they all move on to cards instead.

It wasn’t until their second hand of cards that Jackie looked up at her. She was thankful and a little disappointed at the lack of attention Shauna was giving her. She decided to try to make some small talk to smooth everything over, “Shauna, um... What are you majoring in again?” Like she wouldn’t fucking know that. What a dumb question... but it was something that wasn’t silence, and all Jackie could think of, so it was going to be what it was going to be.

“English Lit,” Shauna responded.

“Oh, yeah. I knew that, obviously.”

It was quiet for a second before Nat spoke up, “She’s doing really well, actually. Her professors love her and her writing’s really good.”

Shauna smiled at her, grateful for the compliment, and maybe Jackie was toxic, but all she could think about was the last time she had read something Shauna had written. She dismissed it though, she had moved on, right? “Yeah, I bet. Why wouldn’t they?” Shauna looked at her and Jackie could’ve sworn she saw the corner of her mouth twitch into a little smile for half a second.

“Thank you, Jax.” Jackie nodded, ignoring the way her heart fluttered at the use of her nickname. She hadn’t heard it out of Shauna’s mouth in a long time. The game continued until everybody was starting to wear down. Jackie decided chips and salsa would revive them and made her way to the kitchen. She didn’t notice Shauna get up and follow her until she had opened the fridge.

“We gotta stop meeting like this...” Shauna joked, referencing their last conversation in Lottie’s kitchen. Jackie laughed.

“Hey, look... I’m sorry about last night. I don’t... I don’t know. It felt weird, I guess.”

That look in her eye came back, supposedly at the memory of last night. “You don’t need to apologize. You didn’t do anything wrong. I can’t expect you to stand in a corner by yourself all night, as much as I’d probably prefer it.” Jackie raised her eyebrows and Shauna realized what she had said. Surprisingly, Shauna didn’t back track or try to explain it away like she once would have, instead she stood on it, “I’m never going to like it, Jackie. Seeing it. I— I ruined that, I get it. It didn’t go away, though. I shouldn’t have thrown a fit about it, but I just need you to know why. I just wanted to clear the air.”

That was probably the most Shauna had said about her actual feelings for Jackie in her entire life. Jackie was in shock. “Okay... well... I appreciate that.”

“I just— are you happy?” Jackie didn’t know what to say to that.

“Yeah, I mean, generally. I think so.”

“No, Jax... I mean—” she couldn’t look her in the eye, “Sorry, it’s hard to talk like this, but I’m trying. Lottie mentioned someone... the bartender, I’m assuming...” her eyes were so vulnerable. She was hoping Jackie said no. Shauna was waiting so patiently for her response, and Jackie had no idea what to say.

“That... that’s nothing, really. We’re more friends than anything else,” but that made it seem like they didn’t do anything, which wouldn’t be honest. For the first time fucking ever Shauna had been honest, and Jackie just couldn’t be misleading. “We just... kiss, really. When we’re drunk. It’s nothing more. Never will be.” Shauna visibly flinched at the word kiss, but nodded. Her eyes were on fucking fire, and it made Jackie want to kiss her. It made her want to devour her. In any other situation, she would have.

“I know I asked, and thank you for being honest, but please... I don’t want to know.” Jackie nodded, and it looked like Shauna was going to turn away and walk back to the group,

but she stopped in her tracks and turned back around. She grabbed Jackie's face and kissed her, deep and passionate. The kind of kiss so personal it feels so overwhelming you could cry through it. It ended way too fast, just as it was getting good, and when Shauna pulled away, she whispered, "I just had to, you know. One more time." Then she turned around like nothing happened.

The kiss was amazing. It was better than Jackie had remembered, and she fucking MISSED it. It meant something. Jackie hadn't kissed somebody like it meant something in months, and now she knew she was never going to get it out of her head.

Chapter 23

Part of Jackie wanted to tell everybody about the kiss as soon as Shauna left that night, but part of her also wanted it to be just hers for a second. She went to bed with her lips still buzzing. Shauna had been so... mature. Jackie expected her to be jealous, that was her goal, but for her to handle it by actually talking? That was unexpected... but then combined with the typical Shauna impulsivity with the kiss. It was new... it was different. Maybe it could be different? Or maybe she couldn't be trusted and Jackie was setting herself up for failure... again.

Jackie, Tai and Van got up early the next morning to head back to campus. Lottie actually cried as she walked them out to the car, and the group hug that followed probably lasted 5 minutes. It was sad, but there was only like a month and a half left before they had the whole summer together. They finally made their way into the car, and Van started to reverse out of the parking space when Jackie decided it was time.

"She kissed me last night." Jackie said simply. Van slammed on the breaks and Tai whipped her head around to the backseat so fast it could have snapped.

"What the fuck did you just say?" Van said, now turned completely around to look at Jackie.

"Bro what? When?" Tai spoke over her.

"In the kitchen. I was getting salsa." Jackie said. Van's jaw dropped.

"How the fuck was I too drunk to notice that shit?"

"Trying to finish half a bottle of vodka and half a bottle of tequila in one night will do it, love." Jackie said with a short laugh.

Van rolled her eyes and Tai smacked Jackie's thigh, drawing her attention, "What happened!"

"I was just trying to apologize for the whole club incident. It was immature of me and I felt guilty about it. We were alone and I felt like I had to mention it." Tai nodded for her to continue.

"Very mature of you, Taylor," Van said with a grin.

Jackie continued, "she told me I didn't need to apologize, but then started talking about how she knows she messed everything up between us, but she's never gonna like seeing me with somebody else. Like she's never gonna feel right about it. She was like... actually communicating. She asked if I was happy with my bartender... thanks for that by the way," Jackie shot Van a look and she responded with a guilty look and a slight shrug.

"I tried to tell her that we aren't really like that, but it didn't feel honest to say we weren't doing anything. She was being like... genuine, and vulnerable. It caught me off guard, honestly, and I felt like I had to be honest about it." Tai nodded and seemed impressed by

that, encouraging Jackie to keep talking. "I told her we really just kiss when we're drunk and that it was never gonna be anything more than that. But yeah, I know... shockingly she stopped me and told me she didn't like hearing about it, but appreciated my honesty, and it looked like she was going to walk away, but she just turned around and kissed me. She said 'one last time'."

Van looked like she was still processing, and Tai asked, "Okay... how are we feeling about that?"

Jackie wasn't sure what to say, "I don't know... the Shauna I knew never would have done any of that... except for the kissing and then pretending not to part, now that I think about it. But she's NEVER communicated like that. She was just honest, and up front. She told me how things made her FEEL. I don't know," Jackie looked up at them. Tai was almost scowling at her, like she was trying to figure her out, and Van was squinting, seemingly having the same problem. It gave Jackie anxiety to see them trying to figure out what to make of it all, and she was grateful when they looked at each other and finally Van broke the silence.

"What do you want from this?"

"What do you mean?"

"Like... Shauna said it was one last time, or whatever, but is that what you want?" Jackie paused, opening her mouth to say something but she realized she had no idea what to say. All of a sudden those drunken, self loathing filled nights rushed back to her and she just felt sad. Van continued, "I've just kind of been thinking about your end game here since that night at the bar. I obviously knew what you were doing... and you know I support any and everything you want to do, but I also remember how awful you felt, and how bad that place was for you."

Tai followed her, "Yeah... maybe it would be good to just have a clear mind about where you're headed. Some kind of plan?"

That was kind of overwhelming. It seemed like they were assuming she was interested in doing anything at all with Shauna. She wasn't even sure yet. "Guys, look. I don't even know that I want to do ANYTHING about it. It happened like 8 hours ago. I have no idea how I feel about any of it. I don't even know how SHE feels about it." That got a chuckle out of Van.

"You think that Shauna would have no interest?" Tai asked.

"I didn't say that... I just said I don't know."

Van locked eyes with her and she said very slowly, "The girl looked ready to kill somebody she had never met before at that club, and then again at the insinuation that you had kissed somebody else, and then she kissed you, and now you think she's uninterested."

"I didn't say that!"

"I will never understand the way your brain works. Like, your train of thought goes in a full circle before getting to the common sense part." Tai said. Jackie laughed, not even trying to defend herself.

“I mean the whole, ‘thought you were dreaming sex every day’ ordeal was one thing, and now this? Crazy shit, Jax.” Van said.

That kind of diffused the situation, and Van put the car back in reverse and got on the road. The whole trip Jackie obsessed over that kiss. It MEANT something. It meant everything, but Jackie just wasn’t sure exactly what, like specifically, it really meant. The past two breaks have shown that they were capable of being in the same room, alone, without screaming or crying or anything. That was good right? The main problem was that Jackie still had a lot of unresolved feelings about Shauna, displayed primarily by the little show she put on at the club. She had a lot of unanswered, and truthfully, unasked questions about everything, and deep down she felt like maybe she should just be grateful for what the whole situation gave her, instead of trying to have it all. She was growing into a person she really liked, and when she was with Shauna she had never even realized that she existed, really.

It gave her a headache. She drifted off thinking about it, and only woke up when she got back to Columbia. She said goodbye to Tai and Van, and promised to call when she could before getting on the bus back to Rutgers.

The nap was no help for her headache and crowded mind. It would be better for everybody if they got along, right? Would that not be the best case scenario? Jackie had thought about it so much that she forgot how she really felt about it at all. She got back to her campus and collapsed onto her bed. It was a little after 2 pm and she decided to do some homework. If she was going to be thinking, it might as well be productive. It was slow moving, but eventually she got to a point where there was nothing left to do around 7 or 8, and found herself thinking yet again. She was thinking about the kiss, obviously, but also the rest of it too. She thought about kindergarten when they met for the first time, middle school when they went to their first party together. She thought about Ms. Shipman and all of their family meals. She had tried so hard not to think about any of the good stuff, that she didn’t really realize how lonely she had been without a family. She had a new one, and that was great, but Ms. Shipman was like her own mother. Jackie started to wonder how much she knew, and what Shauna had decided to tell her. She wondered if she missed Jackie as much as Jackie had been missing her.

She couldn’t collect her thoughts to save her life, and around 11 pm she decided that if journaling was able to work for Shauna all those years, maybe she should try it too. She flipped to the back of her consumer behavior notebook and wrote the date at the top like Shauna always did, and she tried to think of where to start. She pretty much just stared at the blank page for 5 minutes. She wrote down the first sentence, Shauna kissed me, and I’m trying to figure out how to feel about it. She was unsure of this whole thing. It didn’t feel helpful, it just felt more overwhelming trying to figure out what was supposed to be on the page. Writing about not knowing did not feel like it was helping her to know it. She crumpled the page and threw it at the trash can under her desk before slamming her forehead onto the now empty page of her notebook.

What the fuck was she going to do? She could always just keep ignoring everything... but it felt like she was supposed to be DOING something. She had been in this limbo... she had felt in limbo for almost a year. She was angry for most of it, but she didn’t think she was angry anymore. Thinking about it just made her sad.

Her thoughts were interrupted by a knock at her door and a slightly drunk Renee on the other side. “Jack, babe. Are you home yet?” Jackie sat up, laughed and made her way over to let her in.

“You said you were coming by the bar. What happened?”

Jackie led her to the bed and sat down. “I’m spiraling.”

“Oh no, what happened?” Jackie looked up at her and felt compelled to just tell her everything... she stopped herself like she typically would, but they were friends, she was Jackie’s only real friend at school, and she would be unbiased about everything, too.

“Shauna kissed me.” Renee’s jaw dropped and she half smiled, excited for the tea. Jackie told her everything and caught her completely up to speed.

“Oh. My. God.” Renee laughed and then covered her mouth, Jackie smiled at the scent of tequila on her breath. “Sorry... not laughing at you... it’s a little awful. You are clearly very stressed... but the tea is PIPING hot right now!”

Jackie laughed, glad somebody was enjoying it. “You’re drunk, huh?”

Renee looked taken aback, “What? Me? No, absolutely not.” They stared at each other in silence for a second before both breaking out in laughter. This was nice. This was the least complicated her head had felt in a while. “So... was it good?”

Jackie’s jaw dropped and she blushed a little, she said quietly, “It was fucking AMAZING. Don’t take offense to this, seriously.”

Renee laughed again, “I won’t, obviously. Spill.”

Jackie caught her up on the drama and got stuck again on the whole kiss part, “It was short, but it felt like it was everything. I had completely fucking forgotten how good it felt to kiss her. I can’t even believe that was a feeling I could ever forget.”

Renee was grinning ear to ear, “So...”

“So, what?”

“What do you mean so what? So what are you going to do?”

“Well I have no idea how to feel... hence the thought spiral.”

Renee cocked her head, looking very confused, “What do you mean you don’t know how to feel? You just told me how you felt.”

“What? No! Just because it felt good doesn’t mean I feel good...”

“Why wouldn’t it mean that?”

“Because I have absolutely no trust in her. Part of me is still very deeply damaged by that, leaving me with no desire whatsoever for any kind of relationship. Which is another problem.”

“I see... I see. So, why don’t you just do what we do with her?”

“Yeah that would probably end in a massive dumpster fire... or murder. Van let a couple details about you slip and that’s what prompted the whole thing, not to mention the whole club jealousy thing, too. Were you even listening to my story?”

“She said she just didn’t want to hear about it. That doesn’t mean you guys couldn’t do it. I mean would you want to?”

“God, I don’t know. I kinda hate the thought of her doing anything, too. After everything with my ex I feel like I’d just be wondering all the time.”

“Do you think it would be better if you just already knew she was sleeping with other people?”

Jackie felt like she had been slapped. Who said anything about Shauna sleeping with somebody else. “No. Definitely not.” There was a very obvious edge to her voice.

“Okay... heard. My bad. Why don’t you just talk to her?”

Jackie was confused again. “Talk to her about what?”

“Just talk. Didn’t y’all do that for like 15 straight years?”

“Yeah... I guess.”

“I mean, you don’t have to obviously. I’m just saying I feel like you’re doing a lot of thinking and you might not need to yet. You haven’t even had a real conversation with the girl. Maybe you do still hate her. Maybe you have changed and grown and you don’t need her anymore. You’re wondering things without letting yourself get all the information.”

Jackie just paused... Renee made a lot of sense. “So... I just like call her? I don’t even have her number.”

“Bitch. You are a very smart girl. We both know you could have her phone number in 5 minutes. Do it, don’t do it, I don’t care. But don’t act like you can’t or like you have all these reasons why it isn’t an option.”

Renee really was making a little too much sense now. Jackie was overwhelmed by it. “Yeah... you’re right, I know. Just not now, okay?”

“Yeah, babe, I get it. Sorry, I just do feel like it would be good for you.”

Jackie smiled and leaned into her a bit. “You’re probably right about that too.”

Renee giggled and Jackie found herself lost in those brown eyes, “You know how much I like to be told I’m right... what are you trying to get into here, Jack?”

Jackie closed the gap between them and climbed on top of her. She kissed her softly, trying to recreate the way it felt with Shauna. She was hoping that Shauna had just reignited something in her, and really it had nothing to do with her. Jackie wasn’t feeling it, and she got frustrated, trying to make it happen. She ground her hips into Renee’s, making her moan. Renee kissed her hard and aggressively, laughing through it. That’s what it was supposed to be. Fun. Jackie was trying to make something happen that was never going to. She played into Renee’s needs, understanding she wasn’t going to get what she wanted, and met her energy.

After a few minutes, Jackie broke the kiss. “You taste like tequila.”

“I drank a lot of it, so...” Renee was smiling at her.

“Yeah, I can tell.” Jackie smiled and shook her head, “Need a change of clothes?”

“Oh, you take such good care of me, baby. Yes please!”

Jackie chuckled and threw a pair of shorts and a crewneck at her. Renee changed and crashed immediately into Jackie’s couch. Jackie had settled into her bed, feeling a lot better about all of it.

“It’ll be good, Jack. You just gotta pull the trigger.”

Jackie laughed. “Good night, Re.”

“Good night!” It took no more than 3 minutes for gentle snores to echo through the small dorm room. It didn’t take much longer for Jackie to fall into a deep sleep either.

Chapter 24

Jackie was procrastinating. She had called Lottie five times in the following two weeks, but was just completely unable to ask the question. It felt like once she had Shauna's number, she had to call. Not to mention, she knew Lottie would question it, and ask why she wanted to call. Jackie didn't really know the answer. She didn't even know if she wanted to call, but the more steps in between her wanting to call and her actually being able to, the less likely she would ever go through with it.

She dialed Lottie's number again and listened to it ring, "Hey, this is Lottie!"

"Hey, Lot! I missed you... just wanted to check in. How's everything going over there? What are you guys up to?"

"Jackie! Hey, babe. Nat's working, so I'm just here reading a bit, listening to some music. I missed you too. What are you up to tonight?"

"I'm gonna head to the bar later, well actually in a few minutes here, I guess. I'm already kind of late," Jackie chuckled into the phone.

"Your girl's gonna miss you, Jax. Was there something you needed?"

Jackie paused and thought, but it didn't take long for her to chicken out of it, "No, no. I just missed you is all."

"Mhm... and have you been missing Tai and Van like this for the past few weeks? I mean I love hearing from you obviously, but I feel like there's something else going on..."

Lottie had her there. Okay. "So, okay. I guess I've just been thinking about some stuff."

"Like what?"

"You know... about Shauna, I guess, and some other stuff too. I've been thinking about calling, maybe. I'm not really sure if I even want to, but I talked to Renee about some stuff and I just thought that maybe it would be good? I don't know, it would at least make some stuff easier for you guys right? What do you think about it?"

Lottie was silent for a while before responding. "Nat and I don't need you doing stuff that makes you uncomfortable just for our convenience."

"Well, I know that. I'm just saying, maybe it would be a good thing for a few reasons. I mean... it could be a bad thing for a few reasons, right?" Jackie laughed, "But if it's even odds then why not consider it?"

"Yeah, I guess I see the logic there. You know if I give you her number I'm going to have to tell her, right?"

"Oh, yeah. I mean... I guess that's fine. It's only fair."

"Jax... what are you expecting from this?"

“Nothing. A conversation, potentially. I don’t even know if I’ll call, honestly.”

“Okay. As long as you’re sure? I don’t want to put you in a bad spot by telling her, but I also can’t spring it on her. I’m sorry, Jackie. I just feel like I gotta keep the peace a bit.”

“No, I get it. I’m sure.” Jackie felt very unsure, but she felt bad enough for stressing Lottie out, and she didn’t want to keep her longer than she needed to.

Lottie gave her the number, which Jackie wrote down and repeated back to her, just in case she messed it up somehow. “Thank you, Lot. I’m sorry to ask you for it.”

“No, don’t apologize. Just... be careful with her, you know? She’s always been a little fragile.”

No, Jackie thought. Those arms and those thighs were anything but fragile. “I will be. Thanks again. Love you!”

“Love you too, babe. Be safe tonight.”

Jackie hung up the phone and looked at the number in front of her. Okay. She did that. That could be a good thing, right? Or maybe... not so good. Who knows. Jackie ran out the door, grabbing only her keys and letting the door slam shut behind her. She made her way to Triangle and strutted right up to the bartop.

Renee found her and smiled, making her way over. Jackie leaned in and said, “I’m gonna need a shot and vodka cran to wash it down please pretty lady.”

“Ooooh, I could get used to this flattery, Jack. Keep it up and they’re on the house tonight.” Jackie smiled and winked at her. Renee came back to the counter with two shots and a vodka cran. She lifted one of the shot glasses and Jackie grabbed the other. They downed it together and Jackie grabbed her drink to chase it. “So... what’s this weird energy you got going on here?”

Jackie took another long drink, “I called Lottie.”

“Oh?” Renee raised her eyes and a smile teased at the corner of her mouth. “You got the number this time?”

Jackie smiled a little bit and met her big doe eyes, “Yeah, I did.”

Renee threw her arms in the air, revealing her boxers that sat just above her waistline. “Fucking FINALLY.” She turned around and grabbed the bottle of vodka from behind the bar and poured out another two shots. Jackie giggled and Renee held up the glass, ‘To you finally growing a pair!’ They took the shot and Jackie felt it rush into her chest, warming her up. She looked back at Renee, the way her neck looked as she downed the shot. She grabbed at her glass again to chase her shot, making eye contact over the side of the glass with Renee. She licked her lips, and Jackie couldn’t stop her eyes from dropping down to them. She grabbed the collar of Renee’s shirt and pulled her into a kiss. It was a rough, messy kiss that made it clear it’s only purpose was to clear Jackie’s mind. Renee pushed back, leaning into it and sucking Jackie’s bottom lip into her mouth. Jackie moaned quietly and Renee pulled away. Jackie followed her, upset about the distance it left between them, “I could be SO down for this messy, amped up, about anything other than me makeout sesh... but I do actually still

have to manage the bar..." she smiled wide and a little crooked. Jackie rolled her eyes and smiled back.

"Yeah, yeah. Go on, make your money girl." Jackie turned away from her and finished her drink. She spent the rest of the night dancing, flirting, and drinking. She was having fun. Suddenly, for the first time in a year, she was so close to Shauna again, but this time she had all the power. She could call or not call. She got to decide. It felt good. At the end of the night, Renee had to close up and Jackie felt like she could pass out on the bar top. She decided to stumble back to her place alone, half a mile through campus, up the stairs and through the door. She immediately went back to her desk, looking at the number she had written down earlier, and it felt less like something to be excited about and more like something to be terrified of. She immediately dialed the phone.

"Hello?" She was sleepy on the other line, and Jackie remembered how late it was.

"Who is it, babe?" Jackie could hear Van in the background.

"Hey... I'm sorry. I'm an idiot, it's like 3 am."

"It's Jackie. No, it's okay. Are you okay?" Tai asked.

"I'm good, yeah. Just a little drunk. I miss you guys so much."

"We miss you too, babe, but its late as fuck. Something's up."

"I got Shauna's number from Lottie."

"Oh fuck. I'm putting you on speaker." Tai said. Jackie heard some rustling and Tai's voice repeating what Jackie had just said for Van.

"Ummm. Okay. Why?" Van asked.

"I was talking to Re, and she just really dumbled it all down. I think I want to talk to Shauna, get a read on how I feel about it all. I just also think I don't want to do that at all."

"Hmmm. So, let's just say you do call. What are you gonna say?" Tai responded.

Jackie whined. "I don't know... what the fuck am I gonna say?"

Van laughed, "Jackie you are too fucked up to be this stressed. Just don't call her now. Go to bed, we can brainstorm tomorrow."

"Please. Bed. Yes." Tai groaned. Jackie covered her face with her hands and looked at the phone number again.

"Okay, yeah. Bed. I'm sorry. I'll call tomorrow."

"Goodnight, baby. Get some sleep." Van said into the phone before slamming it back down on the receiver. Jackie crashed into her bed and tossed and turned all night. What the fuck was she going to SAY? She had nothing. Her mind was completely blank. Eventually, she passed out.

She stared at the number on her desk for the next two weeks but never called. That first sentence just kept tormenting her. I mean, she couldn't just say hi, but what else was there?

She just couldn't. Every day she lost sight of the point of it all, until eventually she just gave up.

Summer came quickly after that and Jackie was beyond excited to be back with all the girls. Lottie had everybody over that very first night, everybody including Shauna. She was wearing a white tank top with a flannel that she had taken off after her third drink of the night. Her hair was longer now, and she had started doing her eye makeup a little differently. Her arms were toned, like she had still been working out, and she kept LOOKING at her. Jackie had been trying not to stare all night, but as soon as she took her flannel off there was no hope. Her tits were bigger now than they were when Jackie had last saw them, and they were on display. Jackie remembered the way her nipples looked, and the way they felt on her tongue. She remembered the way Shauna moaned when she touched them. It didn't take long for the two of them to find themselves alone in the kitchen. Jackie stared as Shauna poured a drink for herself and one for Jackie too. Shauna found her eyes and looked at her, a little smile on her lips and a squint in her eyes.

"So... Lottie told me she gave you my landline."

Fuck. She should've known Shauna would bring this up. "Oh... yeah. She did."

"You didn't call." Jackie looked down at her feet. She didn't know what to say. "Did you want to call?" Jackie looked up and saw a look in Shauna's eyes that she hadn't seen much. Shauna Shipman was scared.

Jackie sighed. "I didn't know what to say."

Shauna just nodded, looking away. "Yeah. I get that." She looked so sad and disappointed.

Jackie felt the guilt deep in her gut and couldn't stop herself from grabbing Shauna's attention back. "I thought that we could talk, you know? For Lot and Nat, I mean."

Shauna's head snapped up and Jackie was lost again in those eyes. "Yeah. That's a good idea. We could do lunch, maybe? Tomorrow?" Jackie was caught off guard at the way Shauna jumped at the opportunity. What the fuck was she gonna say? She just nodded, and Shauna smiled at her. "Like 2ish? Does that work?" Jackie nodded again and Shauna left her in the kitchen alone, with nothing to do but stress and finish the drink she had made her. She poured herself a shot, took it, and then another drink and made her way back out to the rest of the group.

Chapter 25

Jackie woke up with anxiety sitting in the pit of her stomach. Shauna had already left having gotten up early, which Jackie was grateful for. She slammed her hands into her face and found Van shuffling through Lottie's movie collection next to her.

"What's wrong with you?" She asked without stopping her search.

"I fucked up..."

"Did you kiss her again?" Lottie asked, coming from the kitchen.

Van laughed and nodded, seconding the question. "No, I didn't kiss her. What time is it?"

"Like 12:30," Lottie said.

"Oh, fuck." Jackie sat up and smoothed out her hands, "I'm getting lunch with her at 2."

Lottie tried to hide her smile with her hands and Van turned around and laughed in her face. "You couldn't even call her because you couldn't think of anything to say and now you're getting lunch?"

Jackie groaned, "Where's Tai?"

"She had to go home. It's her mom's birthday."

"Oh, okay. Can I shower here? And maybe borrow some clothes?" Jackie asked Lottie.

"Yes, of course. Just take whatever."

Jackie walked up the stairs and knocked on Lottie's bedroom door. "Come in, you're good."

Jackie opened the door to Nat picking clothes off the floor, trying to pick up the room a bit.

"Hey, sorry. Lot said I could steal some clothes." Jackie said. Nat shook her head and looked up at her.

"For your date later?" Jackie's head snapped around from Lottie's closet to find Nat staring at her.

"It's not a date." Nat cocked her eyebrow. "We're just talking, Nat."

"Take whatever you need." Jackie looked away from her and grabbed a white short sleeve button up and a plaid skirt, walking out of the room. Did Shauna think it was a date? Fuck. She got in the shower and sat down. She could do this. She could talk to Shauna. Renee was right, she did it her whole life. She would just steer the conversation to Shauna, let her do the talking. She wanted to talk too, right? She got dressed and put her hair up in a messy high pony, exposing her neck. She borrowed a little bit of lip gloss, just a little, nothing crazy. She looked good.

She walked downstairs and saw Nat, Lottie, and Van all waiting for her in the living room.

“Damn, Jackie.” Van said.

“I thought it wasn’t a date?” Nat said.

“I can’t just look good for myself?”

“I mean, you can, but you’re not...” Lottie said with a little laugh. Jackie rolled her eyes.

“Come on, Jax. I’ll drive you.” Van said, getting up off the couch. Jackie followed Van to the car and got in the passenger seat.

“How you feeling, babe?”

“I’m good. I think this might be okay?”

“Yeah. It’s gonna be okay. You look great, you feel great... it’ll be good.”

They pulled into the parking lot of the only possible place Shauna could have been talking about last night and Jackie turned to Van. “Thank you for driving me. Tell me this will be okay?” She could see Shauna through the window. She was wearing a black tank top and a pair of jean shorts. Fuck.

“It’ll be okay. Seriously, Jackie, and if it’s not then you know we’ll all be there to support you.” Jackie took a deep breath, nodded, and walked into the diner.

Shauna looked up as she walked in and smiled at her, “Hey.”

“Hi.” Jackie returned the smile and sat down. A waiter came and dropped off a water for Jackie, and Shauna smiled at her again. They hadn’t said a word.

“So... how are you feeling?” Shauna asked.

“Good, actually. I thought for sure I’d be hungover or something, but nothing.”

“Good, good.” It was awkward. What the fuck was there to say? “Jackie?”

“Yeah?”

“What made you ask for my number?”

“Um... well. My friend, that bartender, Renee. I was just kind of talking about everything. She told me I was trying to make up my mind about stuff when I didn’t have all the information.”

“Oh, okay. What were you trying to make your mind up about?”

“Just... how I feel about stuff. It’s confusing, you know?” Shauna nodded. She wanted Jackie to continue. “You... are confusing.” Jackie met her eyes and realized Shauna had never looked away. She glanced down at Jackie’s lips, and it sent a jolt through Jackie’s entire system.

“What are you confused about?”

“I don’t want to say anything mean, Shauna.”

“Just be honest. I won’t take it that way.”

"You... are the reason I can't go on any dates. You are the reason that nothing I do with anybody means anything to me. I'm broken in some kind of unfixable fundamental way because of you, but I can't hate you. I can't be angry at you. It's like I wasn't built for it."

Shauna nodded and looked away. "So, you're trying to figure out if you still can hate me?" She said it like she was bitter, but Jackie could see that she had tears in her eyes.

Jackie grabbed her hand and shook her head, "I want to know why I don't hate you if I can't get over it, either." Shauna nodded, rubbing her thumb over Jackie's hand. "I mean, I tried everything. I tried to journal for fuck's sake." Shauna laughed.

"I'm sorry, Jackie," her eyes filled a little more and her beautiful eyes glistened, "I never should have hurt you."

"Thank you for saying that." It was quiet again.

They looked at each other for some time before Shauna spoke up again, "What's your best case scenario for us?"

Jackie didn't know what to say. She couldn't wish to go back when she was in the closet and hiding and didn't have Van and Tai and Lottie. She didn't like where she was now. She couldn't even fathom a relationship, she had no clue how she could ever trust anyone again in that way, especially Shauna. "I think... I just want to be able to talk, you know. I don't want it to be awkward or weird."

"Isn't that what we're doing now?" Yeah. It was.

The truth was, Jackie wanted more. Shauna was like this magnet. Jackie didn't want to stay away anymore. "Shauna... I miss you, I think."

Shauna's eyes lit up. She smiled a bit, but it was clear she was trying to suppress it. "I miss you too."

"I just don't know what I can handle."

"I'll follow your lead, then. You can call whenever, we can talk whenever."

"Okay... Shauna, we can't kiss like that again. It's too much for me. It's confusing."

"Yeah, I know. I'm sorry I did it. I just missed you, I didn't like how we left things... as hot as it might have been. I wanted to say goodbye the right way." Shauna looked at Jackie's lips again and licked her own before shifting her line of sight to the table. Jackie cleared her throat, trying to focus.

"I just... I don't want to go backwards. I don't want to rehash anything. I want to start over. So, don't bring up Jeff. Don't bring up... us, okay?"

"Okay. If that's what you want, then I can do that." Shauna answered. Jackie looked at her, trying to get a read on how she was taking all this. "Let's start over, then. Okay?" Jackie nodded. Shauna reached over the table and offered her hand to shake. Jackie took it and smiled. "I'm Shauna, it's nice to meet you."

"Jackie. It's nice to meet you too."

"So, Jackie... what are you studying?"

“Marketing, you?”

“English Lit.”

“Do you like it?”

Shauna’s eyes softened, “I do, yeah.”

“Is it just a lot of reading or what?”

“Yeah, it is. But there’s a lot of writing too. It’s hard, and time consuming, but I love it, honestly.” It was really nice to hear Shauna talk about something so passionately. She seemed so genuine. “What made you choose marketing?”

“My boss talked me into it...” Jackie realized that Shauna didn’t know anything and that she had to start from the beginning, “I moved in early, and volunteered at this community center. My boss there said he thought I’d like it and I’m good at it, you know? I do like it.”

Shauna smiled at her. “I’m sure you are.” There was some prolonged eye contact going on, and it made Jackie anxious. The compliment went way further with Jackie than it should have. Was her bar really this low?

She changed topics, “What do you do for fun, Ms. Shipman?”

“Well, my classes are insane. I don’t do much, honestly. Go to Nat’s when I need a break, or the bar she works at. I’ve got a couple friends from class that meet me there sometimes, but everybody’s a little pretentious there, you know? Classes are great, they’re making me a better writer, so I know I’m where I want to be, but the people aren’t really a great fit for me so far. What about you?”

“Well the volunteer thing is paid now, which is nice. I do that most mornings, then classes, and then after that I pretty much live off the cheap bar food at this gay bar in town.”

“Oh, I didn’t realize it was a gay bar... that’s cool. I’m guessing that’s where the bartender works?”

“Yeah. Renee.”

“So, are you like... out now?”

Jackie shrugged. “I mean, I’m not like telling people, but I’m not really hiding it either. My parents would be the only ones I’d have to tell and even if I wanted to, they’re never around long enough to get a sentence out.”

“That’s cool, Jax. I’m happy for you.”

“What about you? Do your friends at school know?”

“We don’t really talk like that, honestly. I mean obviously Nat and Lottie know. I don’t know. I don’t talk about it much, I guess, I’m not really sure what label I would use anyway, and I’m not really dying to figure it out either. I’m too messed up for a relationship right now anyway. I think my mom knows that there was more to you know, what happened with you, but I think she’s just confused.”

“How is your mom? I miss her so much.”

“She’s good, the same really. Still working all the time. I feel bad because Brown is so expensive, but she tells me she likes to do it so I guess it’s fine.”

“What did you tell her when I stopped coming around?”

Shauna looked down, a little ashamed. “I told her it was about Brown. I really don’t think she bought it but I couldn’t bring myself to say any of it out loud. I think she realized how close I was to a breakdown because she never pushed too hard for the full story.”

That kind of pissed Jackie off. Ms. Shipman thought Jackie was this asshole that found out her best friend got a scholarship to go to an Ivy league school and cut her off entirely? Shauna was the fucking victim of the situation? Seriously? Jackie just nodded, biting her tongue. They’re starting over, she reminded herself. This situation can’t be pissing her off anymore. She spent the rest of lunch reminding herself of this. Shauna seemed good, more mature than before. She kept shooting small glances at Jackie’s lips, at her body when she stretched, and every time she caught it, Jackie felt her face get hot. She tried her best to ignore the looks, but everything about Shauna lit a fire in her. They talked about everything that was safe. They talked about the past year and about what their plans were for the next one. Shauna’s eyes got darker when Jackie mentioned that she was planning on getting an apartment with Renee next year, and she found herself stuttering when she assured her it would be a two bedroom.

“She’s actually planning on coming to town next week. She’s gonna stay with me for a couple days while my parents are out of town.” Jackie looked up at Shauna cautiously.

“Oh... that will be fun. Has she met everybody yet?”

“She met Tai and Van like twice when they came to visit, they all got along really well. She hasn’t met Lottie, but she’s excited to, they’ve talked on the phone a couple times I think when Re was over.”

Shauna squinted ever so slightly at the use of the nickname and said, “Well that will be fun. I’m excited to meet her.” Jackie tried to hide her shock, apparently not very well because Shauna continued, “Unless you don’t want me to meet her. Sorry, I shouldn’t have assumed.”

“No! No it’s okay. I just didn’t think you would want to, I guess.”

“We’re friends, Jax. I wanna meet her, if it’s cool.”

“If you’re good I’m good, but she’s touchy and she’s flirty and it’s not something she’s ever very good at hiding...” that look was back in Shauna’s eyes, “I’m not trying to be a dick, I just want to warn you, since you said you didn’t want to see it or hear about it.”

“I’ll be okay... besides, I’m a little curious now anyway.” Shauna smiled and Jackie laughed.

It felt strange but also natural. As long as Jackie could keep reminding herself that this was a fresh start, that the Jeff stuff was no longer important, and that this was a friendship where she shouldn’t want to be touchy or flirty, this could work. They could be friendly. Maybe that would satisfy Jackie’s needs enough to heal a little bit. They sat at that table for three hours, just talking. Jackie had really missed having somebody to say anything to. She missed that person being Shauna. Shauna drove her home after, and Jackie found a comfortable familiarity in her passenger seat. It felt different and the same all at once. It was kind of nice. She thanked her for the ride and headed inside, hoping that this would end up being a good

thing. She was especially hoping that Renee's trip wouldn't be a complete disaster. She felt guilty bringing Renee here, but she knew she shouldn't. This wasn't on her, and she was honestly doing the best she could, better than anyone really expected of her. Jackie wasn't going to stop doing what made her happy just because she had a conversation with Shauna. She was glad she could at least warn her, even though Jackie was pretty sure the warning would end up meaning nothing at all. At least she would have everybody else there to act as a buffer. It would be fine... right?

Chapter 26

Renee pulled into the driveway around 6. Jackie had been prepared. She was a little nervous, and had cooked to distract herself from it. They were having chicken and noodles, simple enough for Jackie to not screw up but still left Jackie feeling like an adult.

“Jackie, baby! Oh my god, I’ve missed you!” Renee practically jumped into Jackie’s arms and Jackie gave her a kiss on the cheek.

“I missed you too! It’s absolutely criminal going from seeing you every day to a whole summer without you. Fucked up, honestly. I don’t know how I’m gonna do it.”

“Well, lucky for you I’m all yours next year, AND I get to sleep in a bed. What a win!”

Jackie laughed and led her to the kitchen, “I cooked. Don’t make fun of me, I was excited and had to direct my energy somewhere.”

“I would never make fun of you cooking for me, no matter how domestic it might be. It’s sweet. You missed me,” Renee gave her a little pout and Jackie threw a noodle at her.

“You missed me!” Jackie yelled at her.

“I did. I did. So, what’s it been like being home?”

“Well... my parents were home for two whole days before leaving, which is kind of a record for them. I talked to Shauna...”

Renee’s eyes widened and she smacked Jackie’s arm. “No fucking way!”

“Don’t be too proud. She initiated it. Asked why I never called.”

Renee laughed. “Somebody had to. How did that go?”

“We’re gonna be friends. We started over.”

“Oh? Just like that?”

Jackie rolled her eyes. “You act like I’m gonna hold a grudge for the rest of my life.”

“It’s not really a grudge, love. It’s like damaging shit that you never talked about.”

“Well, it’s fine. I don’t want to talk about it. I’m not like angry about it anymore. I just need to move forward. Maybe being friends with her again will be healing.”

“Yeah, hopefully. You’ve turned down every gay girl on campus and it’s only been one year. It’s bad for business, Jack seriously.”

“Oh, shut up and eat your chicken. How’s the bar? What have you been up to?”

“Just working, writing occasionally. I’m not feeling very inspired these days, honestly.” Jackie nodded and took a bite of her dinner. Renee was a great writer, but refused to actually sit down and do it. She wrote when she thought of stuff. She didn’t sit down and try to think

of stuff. More of a free spirit than Shauna in that way. “So... what’s the plan? When do I get to see my girls?”

“In like... an hour. Is that okay? They’re pretty excited too.”

“Oh yeah, for sure. I just need to shower if that’s cool.”

“Yeah, of course. Shauna’s coming too, actually. So, you’ll get to meet her.”

“Ooooh, I’m intrigued. I’ve been DYING to know what she looks like ever since Van told me she looks like the white, buff, sad version of me.”

“Fucking Van, bro. I swear there is nothing that girl is scared to share. Listen, I didn’t see the resemblance until they pointed it out.”

“Oh I’m not upset about it. You have good taste, no problem there.” She winked at Jackie and took the last bite of her dinner. “Show me to the shower?”

Jackie nodded and placed their dishes in the sink with the pot she had left on the stove top to cool. She led Renee upstairs to her bathroom, passing by her bedroom on the way.

“Okay, wait. I need to see your bedroom first.” Renee beelined for the door and barged in without second thought. “This... is literally exactly your dorm room.” She laughed, and Jackie followed suit. She went to her closet and pulled out the box with all the Shauna/Jeff stuff in it.

“This is what it was like pre disaster. Tai and Van helped me pack it away, and now I just put stuff up as I get it.”

“So this is her, huh?” Renee picked up one of Jackie’s favorite pictures of her. She was in her uniform and she had her arms wrapped around Jackie. Jackie had just scored the game winning goal in the state championship game and the first thing she wanted to do was jump into Shauna’s arms.

“Yep. That’s Shauna.”

“Van was kinda right.”

Jackie laughed, “You guys are all fucking unbearable. You need to shower... remember?”

“Okay, whatever. I’ll see you in a minute.”

“There’s clean towels and stuff in there. Use whatever.”

Jackie looked through the box and found a picture from before Mari’s birthday party, when Shauna had told she started sleeping with Jeff. They were at the soccer field, Shauna stretching her legs on the ground, and Jackie behind her massaging her shoulders. She decided that maybe, since they were friends again, one picture in her room wouldn’t hurt. She used a push pin to pin it up on her wall, next to the other soccer pictures she had up.

Jackie walked down the stairs and got out the vodka she had bought for the night. She took a shot on her own as a bit of a pregame and poured herself a drink to sip on while she waited for everybody. She had just about finished it when Tai and Van whipped open the door and barged into the living room.

“Honey... we’re home!” Van yelled.

“Hey! You guys are kinda early...”

“Not talking to you, babe, no offense. Where’s Renee?”

Jackie rolled her eyes, “She’s in the shower. You guys will see her soon enough. Liquor in the kitchen.”

Tai dropped off a bottle of tequila and a case of beer next to the other bottle on the counter. She cracked a beer for Van and poured herself a drink.

“Me too, please!” Jackie asked, holding out her cup for Tai to fill. She obliged and handed Van her beer at the same time.

“Wow, Jax we’ve got our very own little bartender here!” Van yelled.

“Who’s out here trying to show me up?” Renee asked as she rounded the corner into the kitchen.

“Oh, I could never compete!” Tai said, both her and Van rushed over to give the girl a hug.

They all caught up and Renee took over any and all drink pouring. They heard the door open a few minutes later and Lottie came running into the kitchen to meet them. She gave Renee a massive hug, “Renee! It’s so good to finally meet you in person.”

“Ditto, babe, ditto.” Jackie was admiring the scene, grateful for how well everybody got along when she saw Renee’s eyes move to the kitchen entrance, where Nat stood with Shauna, looking a little unsure. Shauna was wearing soccer shorts and another one of those tank tops, and Jackie’s eyes immediately went to her tits, which she quickly corrected to Shauna’s eyes, which were trained on Renee.

“Hey guys! Renee, this is Nat and Shauna, guys, this is my friend Renee,” before it could get awkward, Renee ran in and gave Nat a hug first, then Shauna. Neither of them looked super happy about it.

“It’s so great to meet you guys! I’ve heard so many good things. Want a drink?”

Van chuckled a little at the mention of Renee hearing so many good things, and Tai laughed a little too, but Jackie was focused on Shauna who was looking Renee up and down. Jackie followed her eyes to look too. Her damp curls were dripping onto her wife beater. She had a pair of loose fitting athletic shorts on with the chain she had insisted on wearing more recently too. Renee looked good. It was weird to see them in the same room, next to each other. It looked like Shauna was sizing her up, but she answered Renee’s offer without too much hesitation. “Yeah, please. I’ll have a vodka soda. Thanks, Renee.”

Nat responded, “I can pour my own it’s alright.”

“No, babe come on you’re always making the drinks, let somebody do it for you for a change,” Lottie suggested, and for Lottie, Nat would do anything. She surrendered the bottle of whiskey and Renee smiled.

“I got you guys, go get comfy I’ll join you in a second.”

“Thank you again!” Shauna said on her way out of the kitchen, making a clear effort to play nice, which Jackie appreciated. Van shot her an optimistic look and followed the others into the living room, leaving Jackie and Renee in there together.

As soon as everybody had funneled out, Jackie turned to Renee and leaned into her side, “Thank god for your annoyingly extroverted tendencies.”

“Nah, it was all good. I wasn’t worried. Were you?”

“No not worried, really. Things can just get a little awkward still and I’m not the best at dissolving the tension all the time, so I appreciate you.”

“No need to thank me. Help me with these?”

Jackie grabbed Shauna’s drink and her own and led Renee out to the living room, where Van had already gotten her hands on a deck of cards to play some kind of drinking game. She handed Shauna her drink, making eye contact as their hands brushed each other. Shauna had that same look in her eye, and Jackie had a feeling it was gonna be there all night.

“Thanks...” Shauna said softly. All Jackie could do was nod and sit down next to Renee and Tai across the circle they had made. The game was fun, but short lived. It was starting to feel rigged since Van was the only one who knew the rules. They turned to truth or drink instead.

“Okay, my turn first. Lottie, what’s one thing that you really admire about Nat?” Jackie said.

“Ugh, gross, Jackie what the hell?” Nat said in response.

“Nuh-uh Nat, it’s Lot’s question not yours.” Jackie smiled at Nat’s discomfort.

Lottie smiled and answered, “She takes everything exactly how it is, and goes at it all full speed. She doesn’t overreact, she doesn’t avoid things. It’s really impressive, honestly. Keeps me grounded.” Nat blushed a little and kissed Lottie on the cheek. It was cute.

“Okay, Tai. You go.”

“Um... okay. Jackie. Who’s your most embarrassing crush?”

“Oh, god, let me think,” Jackie glanced at Shauna who was looking at her intently and she looked away quickly, “you know Coach Johnson?”

“No!” Nat screamed.

“Don’t bully me, okay? She was so clearly gay and I think I was just jealous, but also her fucking legs bro...”

“Oh my god, Jackie. You should’ve just taken a drink.” Van laughed. Jackie looked up at Shauna, who was laughing too. “Okay. My turn. Renee... what’s your type?” Van asked, which Jackie hoped was an attempt to get her to say not Jackie. Probably wishful thinking though, knowing Van.

Jackie raised her eyes and looked at her, waiting on her answer. “Well...,” she locked eyes with Jackie, “blonde, kinda perky, assertive... something like that.” Jackie smiled at her.

“Okay, okay, not too much now Re,” Jackie pushed her away laughing and rolling her eyes. “You have literally gotten with like five girls this year and four of them were brunette. You play too much.”

“Okay, though for real... good communication. You have to be able to actually have a conversation with me. Nothing more frustrating than being shut out.” Jackie looked up at Shauna, who was looking at her feet as she took a long drink from her glass.

“Shauna, you’re up,” Van said.

“Um... okay. Tai, who’s the biggest flirt in this room?”

“Ooh, tough one,” Tai looked between Jackie and Renee before deciding to just take a drink. “Sorry, y’all. Not spilling too much tea yet. It’s way too early in the night for that. Nat?”

“Shauna, what’s one thing you’re proud of from the last year?”

Jackie looked at Shauna, who seemed a little uncomfortable trying to think of something good to say about herself. “I think... I’ve grown a lot. I’m trying to give myself more grace, throwing myself into writing instead of you know, bad coping mechanisms.” Jackie looked over at Tai, who was straight faced squinting at Shauna, not pleased at the mention of her ‘bad coping mechanisms’. Uh oh, enter protective Taissa Turner.

“You’re a writer?” Renee spoke up. Thank god for her. Tai looked over at Jackie, who tried her best to let her know it was fine. She didn’t need to be protected right now. Tai seemed to settle with Jackie’s look.

“Um... yeah. English Lit. It’s been hell trying to figure out how to channel stuff in a good way, but I think I figured it out this year.”

“Oh that’s so cool. I’m in grad school for creative writing. I can’t channel shit most of the time, so that’s really impressive, Shauna.” Jackie smiled at her and looked at Shauna. Renee was being so kind, and it was only pissing Shauna off more. Her eyes had that look in them again.

“Well, if it helps I’m not nearly creative enough to study creative writing. That’s pretty cool too.” Jackie looked between the two of them, not loving this interaction for a reason she couldn’t quite pin down.

Lottie spoke up next, “Van, what is your biggest argument with somebody in this room?”

“Well... it wasn’t exactly an argument, but the most pissed off I’ve been is when I caught Jackie trying to drink herself to sleep every night last summer. Do you remember that shit Lot, when we walked in on her finishing off her third bottle of wine in two days? God, I don’t think I had ever really yelled at anybody before that.”

Lottie nodded and looked at Jackie, “I’m just glad you didn’t fuck around with that stuff for too much longer.”

Jackie looked up and saw Shauna staring at her, apparently unaware of her little drinking problem. “Sorry for the little scare, guys. I was all kinds of fucked up. I’m good now though, I promise.” They decided to take a break to refill their drinks and switch games. They had run

out of questions to ask, their drunkenness starting to slow down their brains a bit. Shauna got up to go to the bathroom, and Jackie and Renee offered to refill everybody's drinks.

Renee was showing Jackie the art of a whiskey sour when Shauna walked in. Jackie hadn't noticed how close she had been standing to Renee until Shauna kind of backed away a little awkwardly, not wanting to interrupt anything. Jackie took her hand off of Renee's arm as she finished making the drink.

"I'm gonna go give this to Nat, can you guys handle the vodka drinks?"

"Yeah, I can get them. Thanks." Jackie said, never looking away from Shauna. Renee slid past her and Shauna walked over to Jackie and started to make her own drink.

"She's pretty," Shauna said without looking up.

"She is, yeah," this conversation made Jackie sick to her stomach. "Are you okay?"

"Yeah, no. I'm good. I'm happy for you." She still wouldn't meet Jackie's eyes.

"Shauna, stop," Jackie grabbed her shoulder to get her attention. "I told you it wasn't like that. It's not gonna be like that."

"Why not? You're clearly her type."

"I'm not, actually. She's just playing it up. I tried to warn you."

Shauna scoffed at her and rolled her eyes. There is nothing on the planet that was able to piss Jackie off the way Shauna's eye rolls could. "Yeah, right." Shauna looked back to her drink, ignoring everything Jackie had said.

"What do you want me to do here, Shauna? I thought you were curious and wanted to come?"

Shauna's head snapped up and she took a step toward Jackie. "The blonde girl she was with... was that you?"

"What are you talking about?"

"You said 4 out of 5 were brunette. Who was the blonde?"

Jackie scoffed, "There wasn't a blonde. She was a redhead. I've been trying to fucking tell you, Shauna. It's not like that. I wouldn't lie to you about it."

Shauna looked up at her, a little frustrated and a little ashamed. "I'm sorry... you just—you make me crazy, Jackie."

"You wanted to come, Shauna."

"I couldn't stay away from you if my life depended on it."

"I told you. You can't say things like that." Jackie looked her up and down, uncomfortably aroused by Shauna's jealousy.

"Why not, Jackie? I'm being honest."

"Because it's confusing," Shauna was staring at her the same way she did all those times last year. She wanted Jackie in a way that couldn't be put into words, a way that Jackie only

knew through action. “And you have to stop looking at me like that, too.”

“Like what?”

“Like you want to fucking eat me, Shauna. Come on!” Jackie was pleading with her now, “I’m really trying. This year without you has been so dull. I want you in my life. I just can’t handle all of this, please.”

Shauna took a deep breath as she walked over to her, clearly upset and she grabbed her hands. “I’m sorry, Jackie. I’m trying too. It’s hard to see how happy other people have made you when all I’ve done is hurt you. I’ll try to trust you more, okay? I know you wouldn’t lie to me. I’ll work on my jealousy stuff too. I’m sorry.” Jackie took a deep breath. She looked at Shauna and could feel the turmoil inside her. Jackie was torn too, she wanted to comfort her so badly.

“Hurting me wasn’t the only thing you did, Shauna”

“No, but I really made it count when I did it, huh? I didn’t know... about the drinking. I’m so sorry.” Shauna couldn’t meet her eyes. She was so upset. It pained Jackie to see her that way.

“How I handle my problems isn’t your fault,” Jackie squeezed her hand, “Just because you caused a few problems doesn’t mean you’re responsible for the way I avoided them.” She couldn’t look at Shauna too long before she started to notice everything she used to love about the girl... everything she probably still does, but a relationship would be crazy. Tai and Van would both kill her, it would probably blow up and end up causing more issues than before, which was absolutely not the point. But now, Shauna was being vulnerable. She was close... too close, and her lips were all pouty and she was touching her hands. Jackie leaned in and kissed her. It was soft, and caring. She knew it was unfair. She knew she was sending too many mixed signals, but it was like she couldn’t help herself. It wasn’t a want, but a need to be closer, to feel her again. Shauna pushed her tongue into Jackie’s mouth and she was breathing like she was rabid for Jackie, with little moans mixed in too. Jackie felt her insides melt at the sounds. She grabbed Shauna’s jaw and pulled her closer before finally pulling away.

“It’s hard for me, too okay? I’m sorry. I knew this wasn’t a good idea. It was too soon. You meeting Renee was a bad plan.” Shauna stared into her eyes and Jackie felt her knees go weak. Now that she had a taste it was like she needed everything. She needed to devour the girl and taste and feel every inch of her.

It took every ounce of her will power and Shauna backing away to snap her out of it. “Okay. We can figure this out. We just need to talk, right?” Jackie nodded.

“Tell everybody I’m in the bathroom. I’ll be out in a minute.” Shauna nodded slowly before turning and walking back into the living room. Fuck, that was so mean of her. She knew Shauna was struggling with stuff, and she had to have just made it worse. Or maybe, this put them on level playing ground. Shauna impulsively kissed Jackie once, now Jackie did the same thing... so they’re even. Now they can really start this whole friendship thing. Maybe. She would just have to communicate. That would be okay.

After a few minutes and a shot to stabilize her, she walked out into the living room and the drinking games continued. It was all relatively tame, except for the cuttable tension that sat

between Jackie and Shauna. They were both quiet, Jackie uncharacteristically so, but either nobody noticed or nobody cared enough to point it out. It was still fun though, and Jackie was really glad to have everybody she cared about all in the same room. The drinks kept flowing and everybody was having way too much fun to admit they wanted to go to bed, so they ended up just passing out in various spots of the living room, succumbing to sleep whenever they weren't able to fight it any longer.

Chapter 27

Jackie woke up to the smell of cinnamon... french toast? No, that's something that Van wasn't capable of. She sat up and looked around the living room. Lottie was sleeping on Nat's chest, Van and Tai were sleeping side by side, and Renee was snoring on the couch. Everybody accounted for but Shauna. Jackie stood up and walked into the kitchen, slowly pushing open the door. Shauna had her hair pulled up, wearing the same clothes, only now covered in cinnamon and raw eggs from the look of it. She hadn't noticed Jackie yet, and Jackie was enjoying just watching her navigate the kitchen.

"Hey... good morning." Jackie said, drawing her attention. She jumped and gasped slightly.

"Fuck, Jax you scared the shit out of me," her eyes moved over Jackie's face and body so quickly that Jackie couldn't even register it before she started talking again, "I'm sorry. Did I wake you?"

"No, you didn't. It smells really good. When did you learn how to cook?"

Shauna smiled. "Had a lot of time to practice in Nat's apartment." Jackie smiled back and Shauna looked away, back to her breakfast.

"I saw you learned how to cook too?" She sent a pointed look at the dishes in the sink. Two plates, two forks and a pot. "Or did Renee cook for you?"

"No. I did. It was nothing crazy, really. Just some chicken and pasta." Shauna looked at her again, and Jackie felt out of breath. Her arms were toned, shoulders tight, and Jackie was staring.

"Still, though." Shauna smiled slightly. Jackie was practically drooling now. "I'm sorry... about last night."

Jackie batted her hand at the apology in the air, "Oh, no. Please don't be."

"No, Jax. I had no reason to be upset. We were clear, we set rules, you know. I shouldn't have pressed it."

"Well, I definitely broke some rules too, so let's just call it even." Jackie couldn't stop her eyes from darting down to the girl's lips, and Shauna definitely noticed it. She whipped back around to her pan and placed a piece of french toast on a plate practically overflowing with some that she had already finished.

"Do you want a bite?" Shauna asked. Jackie nodded as Shauna took a fork and grabbed a small bite. She held it out and Jackie held eye contact as she bit it off. Shauna swallowed hard and her face got a little red. Jackie moaned a little as she chewed.

"Wow, Shauna. It's really good. I'm impressed." she smiled nervously.

"You think so?"

Jackie nodded, “Yeah, I do.” Their faces were close now. Shauna was sweating a little bit.

“You made a bit of a mess. Do you want to borrow some clothes?” Jackie looked her up and down. Shauna nodded and Jackie led her up to her bedroom. “You can take whatever.” Jackie sat down on her bed and crossed her legs, watching Shauna look over the pictures on her wall. It was weird that she hadn’t ever seen any of them before. Shauna’s attention was locked on the picture Jackie had pinned up the day before. She grabbed it off the wall and walked it over to Jackie.

“I remember this day.” She smiled.

“Yeah, me too.” Jackie remembered it well.

“Nat was so off that day. She had to have been high. I think all the midfielders ran like 10 miles that day thanks to her.” Jackie laughed. “You were so pissed too... I don’t even think Coach got a word out. All he did was point and we ran, you and Tai did all the yelling.”

“Yeah... I like her now, but in high school Nat used to get on my fucking nerves, seriously.”

“You don’t say?” Shauna asked sarcastically. “You know, you guys are a lot alike.”

“I’m not so sure about that.”

“No, really. You are. Especially now.” Shauna sat down next to her on the bed, and Jackie turned to face her.

“What makes you say that?”

“You just carry yourself differently now, I guess. Before it felt a little... calculated. You’re just you now. Comfortable,” Shauna was looking at her, analyzing.

“In a good way, I hope?” Shauna watched Jackie’s mouth as she talked. She nodded.

“Of course, Jax.” Jackie shifted and their legs were touching. Maybe being in her bedroom alone together was a bad idea. She remembered the last time they were alone in this bedroom. The aggressive, needy hate sex they had.

Jackie’s eyes moved up and down Shauna’s body, trying with everything she had to resist the urge to help her out of that tank top. Shauna cleared her throat. “Sorry. I, um... I’ll put this back.” Shauna stood up slowly, and Jackie admired the muscle in her legs as she did. Fuck. This was so much harder than she thought it was going to be. She got up from the bed and walked to the bedroom door.

“You know where everything is... I’m sure some of it is probably yours anyway. Just take what you need.” Shauna nodded and Jackie left the room, shutting the door behind her. She found Tai walking up the stairs.

“Hey... I was just coming to find you. Is Shauna in there?” She pointed at Jackie’s door and watched Jackie’s face closely for her answer.

“Yeah. She got in a fight with the eggs, so I told her to borrow whatever.” Jackie laughed nervously.

“What are you doing, Jackie?” Tai asked, no-bullshit, per usual. Jackie took her hand and pulled her into the bathroom so that Shauna couldn’t overhear. She sat down on the counter and covered her face with her hands.

“I’m trying my best to do the right thing.”

“By being alone with her in your bedroom with the door shut?”

“Fuck... I know. I just feel like I can’t help myself.”

“Jackie, you know she has feelings for you. I’m not Shauna’s biggest fan, but it’s been a year. Don’t you think this is a little cruel?”

“Who’s to say I don’t have feelings for her?” Tai cocked her head sideways.

“Romantic feelings or sexual feelings?”

“I don’t have romantic feelings for anybody, Tai.”

“Yeah, well she does.”

“I offered her clothes, Tai.”

“I know... I’m sorry. I’m not trying to accuse you of anything. I know you’re not punishing her. I’m just saying to be careful. You two are incapable of talking about your shit, and you’re not going to be capable of sleeping with each other without hurting anybody until you do. This isn’t something you just move past. She broke you, Jax.” Jackie’s eyes welled up with tears, the thought of her abuse of alcohol and all those miserable, numb, thoughtless nights she spent trying to feel anything other than the weight on her chest fresh on her mind. She hopped down from the counter. She knew Tai was right, but something about being in a room alone with Shauna threw all logical thought out the window. She wanted her, so badly. Tai wrapped her arms around her and said, ‘I just don’t want you to get hurt, Jax. That’s all. I want to see you happy. At this point it has nothing to do with Shauna, and everything to do with you.’ Jackie nodded and blinked the tears out of her eyes. “Are you good? You ready?” She nodded again and Tai opened the door. They walked down to the kitchen and ate the breakfast Shauna had prepared.

At this point everybody had woken up and Shauna was back downstairs, dressed in a baggy button up that Jackie had gotten at the mall last semester and a pair of black sleep shorts. She looked great in Jackie’s clothes, and Jackie was doing her best not to stare. They made plans to go into the city that night to go out to the bars. Van insisted that Renee had to see it while she was in town. They all agreed and dispersed to nurse their hangovers, nap, and then eventually get ready.

The night came fast, and soon enough Lottie was driving the group to NYC. Jackie was nervous. Hanging out in Jackie’s living room was one thing, but out at a club, where there’s dancing and loud music and strong drinks, and usually in Jackie’s case, making out with Renee... that was a whole separate situation. Obviously, she was going to try to stay away from that. But maybe it would take away from her need to be doing it with Shauna. It would probably be cruel though. Shauna was dressed in that same red dress she used to wear in high school. The one Jackie picked out. The one Jackie had taken off of her a little over a year ago. Her tits practically spilled out of it now, and Jackie was desperate for anything else to look at.

They got into the club and it was bursting at the seams. People were packed in, pushing everybody into each other. They pushed their way to the bar and ordered two rounds of shots and beers for everybody so that they wouldn't have to work their way back anytime soon. Lottie and Nat stayed at the bar, having found two empty seats, and the rest of the girls made their way out to the dance floor. The music was loud, and didn't have any words, so not really Jackie's favorite, but there was a good beat and she was drunk enough that it didn't really matter.

Half way through the night she found herself pressed tightly between Renee and Van. Renee was feeling up on her, like she usually would. Grabbing her by the hips and syncing their movements up. Jackie was into it, and Renee leaned in to kiss her neck. Over Renee's shoulder, she could see Shauna dancing with some frat guy, staring obsessively. Jackie moaned out loud at the sight of her eyes on her, and luckily it was drowned out by the music. Shauna saw it though, familiar with the way she looked when she let out that sound. Her eyes darkened and she grinded her ass against the guy's crotch. She looked fucking fantastic. Messy, confident, sexy. Shauna's mouth opened and she ran her fingers through her own hair, putting on a show. Jackie was fuming and Shauna could tell. She smiled and grabbed the guy's hand, wrapping it around her stomach. Jackie was ready to snap. That guy got to touch her... got to feel her ass against him, got to touch her waist and hear her breathing. She just watched for a while, infatuated by the way Shauna wanted her to see it. After the song ended, Jackie stood on her tip toes and whispered in Renee's ear. "I'll be right back." Renee nodded and moved on to some masculine looking girl with dark eyes behind her. "Bathroom!" Jackie shouted to Van and Tai, too wrapped up in their own world to really care.

Jackie stormed over to Shauna, who was watching her every move and grabbed her hand with complete disregard for the asshole she was with. She led her into the bathroom, pulling her into a stall and locking the door behind her. She grabbed Shauna's hips, pulled her in and started attacking the girl's lips. Shauna grabbed her hair and pulled, grunting into Jackie's mouth. Jackie's hands moved to Shauna's tits, and at the same time, her lips moved to her neck. "Oh, Jackie!" Jackie pulled the other girl's dress and her bra down to give herself access to her chest. She dropped to her knees on the dirty, sticky floor and licked at and sucked on Shauna's nipples like she needed them to survive. Shauna had her arms extended as far as they could go, holding on desperately to the walls of the bathroom stall.

"I need it, Shauna. I need you." Jackie held eye contact and kept sucking on her tits, moving her hand up Shauna's dress, clinging to her thighs and trying to remember every inch of it.

"You have no idea how long I've dreamed of feeling you again, Jax. Please, baby. Please fuck me, baby." Jackie's eyes rolled back in her head and she pulled Shauna's dress up, revealing her thong. Shauna was so wet that Jackie could see it glistening on her inner thighs.

"Oh my god, Shauna."

"It's all yours, baby. Please. I'm all yours." Jackie pushed her legs further apart and she ran her fingers through the girl's folds. She pushed two fingers inside of her and Shauna fucking screamed. It was the hottest thing Jackie had ever heard. She fucked her hard and fast, timing the way Shauna was bringing herself down on Jackie's fingers. Jackie leaned in and tasted her with her tongue, moaning into Shauna's pussy. She wrapped her lips around Shauna's clit and started to suck. Shauna bucked her hips and Jackie was in awe of the way her orgasm ran

through her. She could feel Shauna's pussy clenching on her fingers, and Jackie licked from her opening to her clit over and over again until Shauna came again. Jackie needed it like it was the air she breathed, and she kept fucking her. Shauna's legs were shaking and she was practically in tears, gripping Jackie's hair and holding her in place. Shauna came again, and this time when Jackie tried to keep going, Shauna held her back by her hair. Jackie had no intention of letting that stop her, and she curled her fingers inside her. Watching Shauna's mouth fly open and her eyes roll back. Shauna still had a grip on Jackie's hair, and Jackie was happy to just watch the way she reacted to her movements.

"You look so fucking sexy like that, Shauna. Needy, ready to please. Do you like how that feels, baby?"

Shauna locked eyes with her and just moaned, unable to form any words. She came hard on Jackie's fingers, her legs shaking hard as she came down from her high. Jackie leaned back in to clean her up with her tongue. Shauna looked down at Jackie's face in between her legs and she got that same primal look on her face that Jackie had been obsessing over for the past year. She pulled Jackie up and used her tongue to clean off Jackie's face.

"You are so fucking beautiful, Jackie." Shauna whispered it in her ear and let her hands wander to Jackie's ass. She picked Jackie up and Jackie didn't hesitate to wrap her legs around Shauna's waist. Shauna pushed her up against the stall door hard and pushed two fingers inside her. Jackie loved being fucked like this. Shauna was holding her up, fucking her in the air. It was rough and needy. She latched on to Jackie's neck, sucking and definitely leaving a bruise behind. Jackie felt too good to care, and she leaned her head back to give Shauna a better angle on it.

"Fuck baby, please don't stop. You feel so fucking good."

"I never want to stop, Jackie. You're doing so good for me baby, you feel so good." Jackie bit hard into Shauna's shoulder and came immediately. Shauna fucked her through her orgasm and then very gently set her back down. She was leaning hard into Shauna's chest, breathing heavily and trying to calm down when Shauna turned her around. She pulled Jackie's skirt over her ass and pressed Jackie's body into the stall door. She pushed her fingers back into Jackie's pussy, pushing deeper than Jackie had ever felt in her life. Jackie moaned and Shauna grabbed her throat, making an arch in her back as she fucked her. Jackie felt all of her. She felt fucking everything, and paired with Shauna's moans in her ear, that was enough to get her off embarrassingly quickly. Shauna bent her over and fucked her through it, forcing her through another and another before letting her back up for air. Jackie turned around and looked at her.

"Fuck, Shauna." She laughed.

"I know."

"Fuck..." Jackie had come back to her senses and realized what this meant. "Tai and Van can't know, Shauna. I'm sorry, but they would fucking kill me if they found out it went down like this..." Shauna smiled.

"Nat too... maybe it's just our little secret?" Jackie nodded and tried to adjust her underwear under her skirt, but no matter what she did she couldn't get comfortable. Shauna watched her with an amused grin, "Give them to me..."

“What? Shauna what are you gonna do with them?” She just held out her hand, and Jackie took off her underwear and handed them over. Shauna played with the wetness on them and her eyes rolled back in her head. Jackie moaned a little bit at the sight and said, “You can’t do that if you ever want to leave this bathroom.” Shauna laughed and put them in her bra, underneath her right tit. She removed her own and put it under the other.

“The growth’s gotta be good for something, right?” she joked.

Jackie was staring, “They’re good for a lot of things...” Shauna bit her lip and looked her up and down. “Okay... no. We need to go.”

Jackie grabbed her hand and led them to the sinks, washing their hands as they maintained eye contact in the mirror. When they moved back out to the dancefloor they saw Renee making out with the girl she had moved on from Jackie with and Shauna turned to her, “Does that not bother you?”

“No, it really doesn’t. She’s having fun, you know?” Shauna just shrugged, clearly not understanding their situation. Shauna went to get another beer and Jackie went to find Tai and Van. The rest of the night was uneventful. She let Renee suck on her neck a little more so that she had a reason to explain Shauna’s hickies the next morning. They left the bar at like 2 am, drove back to Lottie’s and immediately crashed. Tai and Van took the basement couch for privacy reasons (ew), and Renee and Jackie took the guest room, leaving Shauna on the couch. Jackie felt a little bad, but Shauna had given her a look at Lottie’s offer like she was choosing to trust her, and Jackie decided to take advantage. Plus, she was fucking exhausted. She changed into a pair of sweats she had actually thought to pack and Renee’s shirt that she insisted on Jackie taking, claiming she had no issue sleeping in the band T she had worn out to the bar, since she had forgotten the other half of her pajamas at her house. It was a cutoff t-shirt, and Jackie’s side boob was very much exposed, but it showed less than the alternative, which was nothing, so she went with it. She got into bed and immediately fell into a very deep sleep, deciding not to deal with any repercussions from her actions that night until she absolutely had to.

Chapter 28

Jackie woke up to Renee's gasp the next morning.

"Oh my god... I didn't realize I was sucking on your neck LIKE THAT. Jesus, I'm so sorry!"

Jackie played dumb, asking what she was talking about before running to the mirror and laughing. They were fucking dark. Renee would have never left marks like that, only Shauna. She smiled and remembered the night they had and how jealous she had gotten. Jackie knew that she had probably fucked up... but Shauna was dancing with that fucking GUY. He was touching her and he was liking it a little too much for Jackie to just ignore. "No, it's okay. I've got nothing important going on. They'll fade."

"They're gonna give me so much shit," Renee groaned and Jackie laughed at her. They probably would. Re sniffed her shirt and flinched away from it, clearly not a fan of the smell. She took it off leaving behind only her black sports bra. "You know... Shauna handled last night surprisingly well. I was debating on just leaving you alone all night but figured I came to town so that I could spend time with you and ditching you at the bar wouldn't be very nice. I was prepared for her to try to kill me honestly."

Jackie nodded, "Yeah, she did handle it better than expected..." better than Jackie had, that's for sure. A demented part of her kind of wished the old, anger issues Shauna would've come out. She always looked so fucking hot when she was pissed off, but she knew she didn't want Renee to get hurt either.

"I think she even got that guy's number. I thought I saw it on her hand when we were walking out." Jackie's head snapped up at Renee, who wasn't looking at her and her face got hot. She was pissed. They fucked the way they did and then Shauna immediately went and got some guy's phone number. Fucking Christ, why did Jackie keep expecting her to change? This is the same Shauna that fucked her and Jeff in the same day and then lied about it.

"Fuck me, Re. That should not piss me off the way it does." Jackie hid her face with her hands and Renee laughed at her.

"You're just as bad as she is. I gotta pee." Renee got out of bed and walked down the hall. Jackie took a deep breath and got up, having decided that last night was all just a drunken bad idea. She walked to the kitchen and saw Lottie, Nat, and Shauna all leaning against the kitchen counter laughing. When Shauna saw her, her eyes immediately fell on the shirt she was wearing and Jackie remembered that it was a little exposing. Then, Shauna's eyes met the two marks on her neck. One on each side. Lottie and Nat were already there. Nat looked disappointed and Lottie's jaw had dropped and she looked like she wanted to laugh.

"Jesus Christ, Jackie." Nat said it in a judgemental way, shooting a glare at her. She was probably upset on Shauna's behalf, unaware that she had been the one to leave them.

"Jackie! What the hell?" Lottie laughed and covered her mouth.

“Don’t yell at me, yell at Renee.” Jackie looked at Shauna, who seemed a little jealous. That pissed Jackie off, because what else was she supposed to say? They both knew who left them... but Shauna was still upset at just the thought of Renee having done it. Being pissed at her reminded Jackie of what Renee had said and her eyes searched Shauna’s hand for the guy’s number. She found the pen marks on her right hand and noticed that the closer the markings got to her middle and ring fingers, the more they had washed away. Oh. Well that made a little more sense. Jackie had been the one to wash them away. Good, she thought. Now she couldn’t call even if she wanted to. Maybe Jackie’s anger had been a little premature. Shauna noticed Jackie’s gaze and moved her hand out of eye sight, looking a little embarrassed.

“Renee! What the hell?” Lottie yelled loud enough for her to hear coming down the stairs.

“I know, I know! I’m sorry!” She yelled back, making her way to the kitchen. She was still just in a sports bra and a pair of shorts. She looked good. Jackie looked back at Shauna, who had clearly noticed her looking at Renee and was shooting daggers at her with her eyes. She was hot when she was jealous, Jackie thought. Nat got up and walked to the freezer, pulling out a spoon.

“Oh, ew. You guys keep that in there for this reason?” Shauna said, disgusted by the whole thing. Lottie laughed and Nat shrugged.

“Would you rather see the spoon or the bruises?” Nat sent another look of disapproval at Jackie, being clearly protective of Shauna.

“Is neither not an option?” Shauna made eye contact with Jackie and just for a second grinned at her. Jackie blushed. Shauna didn’t want the bruises to fade away. She liked them there. She liked marking Jackie as hers, she always had. Tai and Van walked in a few minutes later.

“What’s all the yelling about?” Tai asked.

“Look at what Re did to Jackie’s fucking neck,” Lottie said, pointing at her. Van gasped and covered her mouth, and Jackie removed the spoon, exposing the other one. She gasped again and started to laugh. Tai looked at her, smiled and then looked back at Renee shaking her head.

“You guys are fucking gross,” Tai joked. The rest of the day was spent lounging on the couch, watching movies. Shauna and Nat had gone home and left Jackie, Van, Tai, Lottie and Renee to spend the rest of the day together before Renee had to go home. It was fun. It was really fun, actually. Jackie and Van tried their hardest to convince Renee to stay longer, but she had to work the next day and it unfortunately just wasn’t possible. After a couple hours of procrastination, Renee eventually got in her car and drove away. Van and Tai stayed with obvious intentions to debrief about the visit.

“So... that wasn’t nearly as bad as I thought it was gonna be,” Van said.

“No, it wasn’t... definitely could have gone worse. Maybe Shauna has matured a little bit,” Jackie responded. Tai laughed. “What? You don’t think so?”

“Jackie, she spent the whole visit staring at Renee looking like she was ready to pounce...”

“But she didn’t! Last year she probably would have.” Tai shook her head and laughed.

“Yeah, I’m pretty sure we all remember what she’s capable of. Remember in 7th grade when she broke that Allentown girl’s leg? The poor girl accidentally knocked you down and Shauna lost her shit on her,” Van laughed and Jackie smiled. It didn’t feel very accidental to Jackie, but maybe it had been.

Tai didn’t seem so amused, “Yeah I remember, it was stupid. She got ejected and suspended over it. We lost the next two games without her.” Jackie shook her head. Tai would be the one to still remember all that.

“No, but really,” Jackie continued, “We talked about it the other night. She admitted that the jealousy is kind of hard to unlearn. We’re talking about stuff as it comes up. Trying to navigate how to make this work.”

Tai raised her eyebrows and looked at Van, who said, “So you like... really want to be friends with her?”

Jackie sighed. “I know you guys probably think I’m an idiot. It’s just been so hard lately to be angry with her anymore. She was all I had for over a decade. I think I just realized that isn’t something I want to just let go of out of spite.”

“So if Shauna can’t get over her jealousy of Renee then what?” Tai asked.

“What do you mean?”

She sighed and tried to reword it, pausing for a second to think about it. Van cut in, “I think she just means... We really love Renee. She’s been good for you.”

“Guys, what? I would never stop being friends with Renee because Shauna is unable to get over herself. If it’s really that big of a deal then AT MOST I’ll just stop making out with her and stuff.” Tai raised her eyebrows and Van held her hands up like she was defending herself. “I mean... the last few days were fine and Renee was close enough to do this,” Jackie pointed to her neck, and that seemed like enough for them.

“Okay... I’m sorry Jax, I just felt like I should check in.” Tai said.

“I’m not being stupid about it, guys. I’m taking care of myself. You won’t have to put me back together again, I promise.”

“I mean... we will if you need us. No questions asked, we will. We love you, Jackie, we just don’t want to see you hurt.” Van said, pulling her into a hug. Tai joined it and they decided to move on. Jackie felt guilty. They were so concerned and so worried about her making a bad decision and Jackie had already done it. What was wrong with her? Not only was she sneaking around behind their backs now, but she was lying to them too. They both left to go home and Jackie decided to take a shower. She looked at herself naked in the mirror and thought about the way Shauna looked at her. It made her feel better about herself to be wanted, no... needed in that way. She looked at the hickies Shauna had left and ran her fingers over them. Renee would have never left these, she must have been really drunk to think she had.

Jackie spent the next couple weeks avoiding Shauna. She knew their drunken bathroom fuck should probably be their last, and Jackie knew that if it was fresh on her mind when she saw Shauna next it wouldn’t be. Her hickies had faded, she had taken up running with Tai every once in a while, and Van had been crashing at Jackie’s place more often than not too.

She was going through a bit of a rough patch with her mom. They had started fighting more since Van came out to her. Tai had told her parents too, but they weren't exactly comfortable with sleepovers. Jackie made sure that Van knew her door was always open, and since then she had shown up randomly every few nights. Jackie was upset for her, obviously, but the alone time with Van was good too. She had been completely caught up on every possible 'good' movie ever released by Van's standards, and she had even gotten Van to watch a couple rom coms, too. Her parents had called to tell her they would be gone for the rest of the summer and were planning on putting the house up for sale when she returned for her second year at Rutgers. Lottie made her promise to live with her over every break until they graduated, and had said that she could even move in now, but Jackie decided to take the alone time as an opportunity to get more comfortable being alone with herself. She was drinking a glass of wine and watching a movie at 11 pm when she got a call.

"Hey, this is Jackie!" She had expected Renee calling from the bar, or Van to ask if she could come crash there.

"Hey, Jax..." Jackie froze and her breath got caught in her throat. "It's Shauna."

"Yeah... I know." It was quiet and Jackie could hear Shauna's breathing on the other line.

"Well... I'm calling, I guess to say that I missed you." She's calling at 11pm to say she missed her? Shauna laughed at herself. "Sorry... this is— I'm a little high right now. I couldn't work up the courage to call without it." Jackie's mind jumped to that night when she had smoked with Shauna at that party and she told her that weed always made her horny. Jackie realized what this was, and knew that she had said the last time would be the last time, but she wanted to see Shauna looking at her like that again. She wanted to be touched, and she wanted to be kissed. She wanted to be fucked, and Shauna wanted it too.

"Do you want to come over? I'm just watching a movie and drinking some wine. We could talk?"

"I'll be there in 10." Shauna hung up the phone a little too eagerly and Jackie smiled. She ran upstairs and changed into a pair of sleep shorts that she could pull up to be just a little bit too revealing and a short tank top with no bra. She knew what she was doing, and she was a little excited to see how long Shauna could hold out. Jackie rushed to the kitchen and took a shot of vodka to calm her nerves. It was then that she heard a knock at the door and she knew immediately it was her. Van or Tai would have just walked right in. She opened the door and Shauna's eyes went wide as she took in what Jackie was wearing.

"Hey," she said. Shauna was wearing an old practice shirt and a pair of sweats. Her hair was messy and fell down past her shoulders.

"Hi," Jackie smiled at her and opened the door wider, inviting Shauna in. "Do you want a glass of wine?"

"Yeah, if you don't mind." Jackie turned and grabbed a second glass from the kitchen, bringing it back to fill it in the living room. "What have you been up to?"

"Just drinking a little, watching movies. Nothing crazy, just taking a little me time."

"Oh, I'm sorry I didn't mean to interrupt."

“No. I’m glad you called... I’m glad you missed me,” Jackie said with a smile. Shauna nodded.

“I was a little nervous to call, honestly. I wasn’t sure how you felt about what happened at the bar.” Shauna grabbed the glass and took a sip, avoiding eye contact while she sat down on the couch. Jackie sat down next to her so that their thighs were touching.

“Honestly... I don’t know how I feel about what happened at the bar either.” She took a drink from her glass and Shauna nodded.

“I get that.” Jackie was trying really hard to hold eye contact with the other girl. She loved how deep those brown eyes were. She was a little tipsy at this point, and was eager to just lose herself in them.

“It’s just confusing, you know?” Jackie couldn’t meet her eyes. She was the one who started it, and now she was telling her that she didn’t know how she felt about it, when she knew how much she fucking loved it. Shauna nodded.

“Yeah I know.” They sat in silence for a minute, just looking at each other. Shauna smelled like lavender and weed.

“I don’t regret it, though.” Jackie looked away as she said it. She wanted to be clear that Shauna didn’t need to feel guilty or ashamed of anything. Shauna was staring so intently at Jackie, waiting for her to say more. “I don’t know what we should do, honestly. I know that it’s probably irresponsible, I know that we should probably really try to be friends, and that we need to set boundaries or whatever, but the problem is... I liked it. I liked it a lot.” Jackie looked up and saw that Shauna’s eyes were red and her lips looked like she had just applied chapstick.

“We’re not very good at that whole boundary thing.” Shauna chuckled and glanced down at her drink, deciding to take another sip. Jackie laughed.

“We never have been.”

Jackie locked eyes with Shauna, allowing herself to take in every inch of her face. She watched Shauna’s eyes move over Jackie’s body and Jackie smiled at her. Her eyes dropped to the other girl’s lips again. She wondered if anybody else had gotten to taste them

“You make it hard, Jax.” Jackie’s eyes flew up to meet hers, now very aware of the way she was staring. “You look at me like that all the time. I know I shouldn’t, but all I ever want to do is act on it. It fucking kills me not to.”

“I’m sorry.” Jackie said, pulling her thigh back so it wasn’t in contact with Shauna’s anymore. Shauna grabbed it and pulled it back gently. Jackie felt her heart flutter and her face started to feel hot. She was blushing at the touch.

“Don’t be sorry, Jax.” They sat in a silence full of tension. They were inches from each other, and Shauna reached out and pushed Jackie’s hair out of her face, tucking it behind her ear. “What do you want?”

Jackie looked down at her lap. “Shauna, I told you—” Shauna cut her off.

“No, Jackie. Not long term. Not ten minutes from now,” Shauna held her chin in her hand. “What do you want right now? In this moment?” Jackie looked up at her and it felt like her

skin was on fire under Shauna's touch. Their faces were so close to each other and it was clear to both of them exactly what Jackie wanted in that moment.

Jackie was helpless. There was no situation where this could end in anything innocent, not when Shauna was looking at her like that, with her hands on her face and her toned thigh so close. "I want you to touch me." Jackie practically whispered it. Shauna's hand moved so that her thumb rested on Jackie's lips. Jackie was sitting straight up now, staring at Shauna who was staring hard at her lips.

"I am touching you."

Jackie blinked, trying to think of some way to say exactly what she wanted. "I want you to touch me like you used to..." Shauna's eyes rose to meet hers and as Jackie opened her mouth to continue, Shauna pushed her thumb into it. Jackie's eyes rolled back in her head and she moaned as she sucked on it.

"Your lips look so pretty like that, Jax." Jackie gasped and Shauna picked her up by her hips with ease, which was crazy since she was sitting down. She had definitely been working out. She positioned Jackie so that she was straddling Shauna now, and her hands wrapped around to hold her by her ass. Shauna's hands moved up her thighs to her stomach and her sides, continuing at a steady pace until she got to her neck. "I'm upset they're gone," she said with a pout, fingers tracing where the hickies had sat.

"I'm sorry... there's nobody else to blame them on now, though. They would know."

"I know..." Shauna tore her eyes away and moved her hands back to Jackie's hips. "Is this what you want? Is this how you want to be touched?" Jackie cocked her head to the side and shook it slowly.

"What do you want, baby?" Jackie pushed her down so that she was laying on the couch and she pulled at the bottom of Shauna's shirt, lifting it up over her head. She wasn't wearing a bra, and Jackie gasped softly at the look of her tits sitting bare underneath Jackie's thighs. She looked at Shauna, seeing in her eyes how badly she wanted this, and leaned in. She kissed Shauna's neck, biting up and down it lightly. She moved down to her tits, sucking at the pale skin. She bit and sucked until there was a bruise forming. It was a spot that nobody would be able to see. It would be just for the two of them. She grabbed at Shauna's sides with her hands, making her moan and throw her head back. Shauna had had enough. She grabbed Jackie and turned them over, dropping to her knees in front of her.

"You're such a tease," Shauna said with a smile. She pulled Jackie's shorts down and leaned in, kissing her bare skin lightly. Jackie shifted back, lifting her hips so that Shauna could get a better angle. She moaned at the taste and the smell of it. "Do you get off on it, Jackie? Watching me try to control myself?"

"Fuck, Shauna. You know I do." She ran her tongue through her pussy and pulled back again.

"Do you like seeing me jealous?" Jackie nodded and Shauna returned to that spot in between her thighs.

"I like seeing how badly you want me, Shauna."

She pulled away again, "I want you constantly, Jax. I don't have to be jealous, I don't have to be teased. I want you all the time. My whole life all I have wanted was you." She leaned back in and Jackie moaned. Shauna must have been trying to prove it to her, because she was eating like she was starved. She had a grip on each of Jackie's thighs, her arms tangled in them so that Jackie was in the best possible position for her. Her tongue was deep inside her, moving back and forth, sucking and licking incessantly. There was no rhythm to it, no way that Jackie could tell what was coming next, just desperation. Her fingers were gripping Jackie's hips so hard she was sure there would be bruises and Jackie was screaming as orgasm after orgasm ripped through her. Jackie never wanted it to stop and it seemed like Shauna didn't either. She barely ever came up for air, obsessed with Jackie's pleasure. Jackie looked at her hands that had gone white with pressure and she pushed Shauna's head away, worried for her well being.

Shauna looked up, upset that she was being disrupted. "I want you to ride me, Jackie. Please. Like you did that night. Just use me. Please."

"Oh my fucking god..." Jackie's eyes rolled back in her head. She stood up and Shauna laid down on the couch. Jackie put one foot on the floor and one knee on the couch on the other side of Shauna's head, dropping herself onto Shauna's tongue. She went slow at first, just cherishing the way it felt. After a few minutes, Shauna got impatient, grabbed her ass and started to move her faster back and forth on Shauna's mouth. Jackie moaned at the feeling. She grabbed onto the couch and matched the pace Shauna had set, feeling every centimeter of the girl's tongue. She fucked her face like that until her legs shook. She leaned back and put her hands on Shauna's thighs to stabilize herself. Shauna gently lowered Jackie's body until she had her back pressed to Shauna's stomach. She wasted no time and pushed her fingers inside of Jackie. She fucked her slow, holding eye contact and moaning with her. Jackie shifted again to give her a better angle, realizing in that position she could move her hand to Shauna's waistband. She dipped below the fabric of her underwear and felt how wet Shauna was. She watched Shauna throw her head back and Jackie moaned at the sight of it. She moved her fingers in circles on Shauna's clit and was shocked when she shook and came within seconds.

"Fuck, Shauna. You wanted it that bad?" She laughed.

"I've been trying to tell you." Jackie pushed her fingers inside, taking Shauna off guard and wiping her grin off her face. They fucked each other simultaneously until the only sounds in the room were their moans and pants. Jackie could tell Shauna was getting close.

"Shauna, baby. I want to cum with you. I want it at the same time. Can you hold it for me?" Shauna whimpered and nodded her head, trying her best to follow instructions. Jackie liked seeing her struggle so she picked up the pace with her fingers, making Shauna get distracted and start to slow down her own.

"Oh, Jackie. Please, baby." Jackie moved Shauna's hand to her lower back.

"Hold me up, baby." Shauna did just that and Jackie used her other hand to rub her own clit. Shauna watched and her eyes went big. Her mouth dropped open and Jackie could feel her pussy squeezing around her fingers. The sight of it along with the added stimulation sent Jackie over the edge and her legs started to twitch, "Cum for me Shauna. Now, baby. You can." Shauna screamed and held Jackie close while she let herself release onto Jackie's

fingers. Jackie collapsed on top of her and tried to slow her breathing when she heard Van's car with that loud, beat up muffler pull into the driveway.

"Fuck. Shauna, that's Van. Get dressed, get dressed. Jackie threw her shirt at her and picked up her own shorts, thankful that they were black and would hide her obvious and uncomfortable wetness. Shauna sprinted to the bathroom with her shirt in hand and disappeared just in time for Jackie to start the movie back up. Van came charging through the door.

"Jackie! My mom is driving me up a wall. Can I please stay here?"

"Yeah, babe of course. Open invite, remember?" Van's eyes dropped to the two glasses sitting on the coffee table.

"Wait, was that Shauna's car outside?"

"Um... yeah. She was lonely and wanted some company since her mom's working so much."

Van squinted at her, "Do you want me to leave?"

"What? No. Come on, sit down." At that moment Shauna walked out of the bathroom looking much more put together than Jackie had expected.

"Oh, hey Van."

Van sat down next to Jackie. "Hey... is it cool if I crash your guys' party tonight?"

"You're not crashing, Van. Don't be dumb. Want a glass of wine?" Shauna offered.

"I'll take a beer if you have it." Jackie nodded and walked to the kitchen, trying to stabilize herself and stop her legs from shaking. She was thankful for the excuse to go wash her hands. She stood at the sink taking some deep breaths and composing herself. Thank god for that fucking muffler. She washed her hands and splashed some water on her face before grabbing a beer and heading back out to the living room. Van and Shauna were chatting casually, and Jackie hung back for a second just watching it. Van had always been more friendly than Tai, but she was never Shauna's biggest fan either. It was clear she was making an effort for Jackie's sake.

"Here, babe." Jackie handed over the beer and topped off her own glass with the rest of the wine.

"Thank you, Jax. So... what is this that we've chosen to watch?"

"Ghost. No judging! You came way too close to the end to turn it off, so deal." She scoffed, but Jackie saw her getting into it within minutes. Van would never admit it, but rom coms are kind of her guilty pleasure. She even saw her eyes get glossy at the end. Shauna finished her glass of wine and stood up.

"Okay. I should probably get home."

"How much have you had to drink?" Van asked. She was a little sensitive to the drinking stuff, because her mom had started drinking again. Jackie chose to answer on Shauna's behalf, diffusing a situation before Van had to explain herself.

“Barely a glass... promise. She’s good.” Van looked at Jackie, trying to figure out if she was lying or not and Shauna offered her pinky.

“I swear. I wouldn’t drive if I had any more to drink.” Van interlocked pinkies.

“Okay, I’m sorry. Just be safe, okay?” Shauna nodded and held eye contact a little too long with Jackie on her way out. When she shut the door Van turned and looked at Jackie suspiciously.

“So... this friendship involves wine and a movie at 11?”

Jackie rolled her eyes, trying to play it off. She knew there was a good reason for suspicion, but Van would kill her, and she didn’t need any more stress in her life right now. “Ours does, doesn’t it?”

“Yeah but we haven’t fucked, so...”

“We started over, remember?” Van raised her eyebrows and laughed.

“Yeah, okay. I’m going to get my ice cream.” Van dismissed the conversation entirely.

“Oh, it’s your ice cream now?”

“Duh... my ice cream, my kitchen, my house... whatever.” Jackie laughed.

“Do I at least get a spoon?”

“I’ll allow it...” Van disappeared into the kitchen and Jackie looked at Shauna’s headlights pulling away. What the fuck was this? It was hard to even fathom how this could end, but Jackie didn’t really want it to... so maybe she didn’t have to? Here she was, confused. Exactly what she had worried about at the start of all this. Exactly why she could never call, except now she was lying too. Van helped her to take her mind off it, turning on Gremlins and handing her a spoon while they shared the carton of ice cream. They both just passed out on the couch, enjoying each other’s company too much to go to bed.

Chapter 29

As the summer went on, Shauna had come over more and more. It had started to seem almost normal for them to be around each other. Jackie knew that it was complicated. She knew there were a lot of things that probably needed to be addressed. The thought of them trying any kind of relationship made her sick to her stomach, much less a long distance one. She loved her... something she had known her whole life, but she didn't trust her. During that period of bliss that they had been in, Shauna had her. Jackie was happy, they were finally acting on their feelings and they were comfortable together, yet Shauna couldn't stop herself from fucking somebody else just to hurt her. How could Jackie even fathom trusting that she would be able to resist temptation while they were four hours apart. Shauna was a smart, beautiful, talented bisexual girl at fucking Brown. There were options, there had to have been, and there will be more. Jackie was RIGHT there and Shauna still fucked Jeff. The thought made her nauseous. If Jackie was being completely honest with herself, she knew that she couldn't offer a healthy relationship with anybody... much less the person that she had spent the last year hating.

Jackie and Shauna spent most of their time following the last remaining rule they had set. They didn't talk about Jeff or much of anything from the past. If a story involved it, they skipped over it and ignored it. It was easy. It was comfortable. No matter how complicated she knew it was, she didn't give it enough thought for it to really feel that way. It felt good. So they ignored the conversation they knew was going to have to come at the end of the summer. Every time she came over, Shauna would seem driven by nothing but sex, creating tension whenever she could and touching her whenever she could, but the second they actually got into it she would blurt out these insanely romantic declarations. She would never voice them before or after... only during. Jackie felt guilty at getting off on them, knowing every time she said it Jackie felt like she was going to cum on the spot, but any time she actually thought about it she felt like she was going to puke. She never insinuated wanting a relationship, and she tried to be as transparent as she could be without initiating the conversation, but it didn't make it any easier. Jackie thought about telling Tai and Van what was going on, but she just couldn't. She knew that they would be so disappointed in her if they found out how irresponsible with her own well being she had been. She wanted to handle it herself, without feeling like she needed everyone else to tell her what to do. She didn't want them to scramble to help Jackie clean up whatever mess she had made. She knew that her friends wouldn't do anything out of obligation, and that when she was hurting they wanted to help her, but it felt like she was forcing them to put their lives on hold. If she got hurt like that again she would feel awful for having ignored their warnings and gone against any advice they had ever offered about the situation. She just couldn't do it.

Jackie had procrastinated the conversation until the last possible day, but to be fair, Shauna had too. They both knew where this was going. Jackie promised herself she would be honest and actually say everything she needed to. Shauna knocked on the door and Jackie opened it. She was dressed in baggy sweats and the biggest sweatshirt she could find, trying to keep Shauna on task.

“Thank you for coming over...” Jackie led Shauna to the couch and Jackie sat down next to her.

“Yeah... of course. I wouldn’t ever let you leave without saying goodbye.”

“Shauna,” Jackie laughed awkwardly, ‘We need to talk about stuff. Like actually talk about it.’ Shauna nodded and looked away from her. Jackie stuttered for a moment before smiling and trying to erase any awkwardness from her voice. She laughed and said what she had been thinking, “You have this fucking magnetism to you. I’m drawn to you, and I’m going to be drawn to you probably for my entire life. I don’t see it ever being any other way.”

“Okay. That’s good, right?”

“Maybe...” Jackie grabbed Shauna’s hand. ‘I don’t know where you’re at right now with this. I’ve been thinking about us. I’ve been thinking about what we’re going to be like after today.’ Shauna nodded at her. It looked like she knew where this was going, so Jackie continued, “I don’t think I can handle this whole... thing we’re doing with you being so far away.” Shauna looked away from her, “I know it’s so childish and so insecure of me, Shauna. It isn’t fair to you, and I feel like it’s gonna seem like I’ve just been using you all summer. I need you to know that isn’t true.” Shauna faked a smile and tried to stop any tears from escaping her eyes.

“I know you haven’t been using me, Jax. It’s always been real, I never thought otherwise.”

Jackie nodded and kept going. “I really don’t want to be mean in the way I phrase this...”

“Just say what you need to say, baby.” Shauna nodded at her reassuringly.

“I can’t handle worrying every night about Jeff again...” Jackie squeezed Shauna’s hand and stared hard, waiting for her response. A tear escaped Shauna’s eye and she wiped it away quickly, looking down to avoid Jackie’s gaze. “Even though I know we wouldn’t be in a relationship, we wouldn’t be exclusive. I know that I still couldn’t be fair to you if we were still, you know... having sex. I’m so sorry, Shauna. It’s not that I don’t want to be able to just forget it all and start over. You have no idea how hard I’ve tried or how much time I’ve spent trying to convince myself I could be more mature or better about this. I’m a disaster, and I promise you don’t want me anyway.”

Shauna’s head snapped up and she looked at Jackie. “Of course I want you. You don’t need to be better for me. You need to be kinder to yourself. You’re not a disaster, and regardless... That’s kind of my fault anyway. I don’t know that I would be able to ever get over it either if it were me. I did something really awful. I betrayed your trust, and I know that.” Shauna’s words failed her, getting too quiet for Jackie to know what she wanted to say. She tried again, unable to make eye contact. “I just want to know how to earn it back... if I can earn it back.”

“A lot of things went into me losing my shit, Shauna. It’s not all on you. I had a lot of things that I was hiding about myself, and I broke when the act I put on broke. That was going to happen with or without everything else.” Shauna squeezed her hand. “I want to be honest with you, I don’t know that a relationship would ever be possible for us. Or I think maybe we just need more time. I don’t know...” Shauna just looked at her. Jackie could tell that she had something she wanted to say.

"I'm gonna break the rules."

"The rules have been broken for months, Shauna. It's okay."

"We need to talk about it." Jackie was confused.

"We are talking about it."

"We need to talk about Jeff, Jackie." Jackie shook her head. She didn't want to. She didn't want to think about Shauna that way. Shauna continued anyway, "You never asked me anything. You told me you wanted to know everything, and you never asked."

Jackie looked at her. "What do you want me to ask you?" She was terrified of this. She didn't want to go back there, she had avoided it for a year.

"Whatever you're still thinking about."

Jackie tried desperately to read her face, to find out if she really wanted that or not. Maybe she was right. Jackie stood up and started pacing, trying to figure out what she wanted to know. There were things that she had wanted to know. There were a lot of things she had wondered and never gotten answers for. "Why did you do it? Don't say you don't know. I need an answer."

Shauna sighed. "Jackie... I need you to know how much I love you. I need you to know that I have loved you since the moment I knew what love was, probably before then too," Jackie's throat felt like it was swelling up. 'It was never about Jeff. He was just like this piece of you. I didn't even see him as a person really, he was just an extension of you. I didn't realize that you were gay. I didn't think it would ever be an option, and Jeff... he was this very easy to obtain and easy to manipulate extension of you that felt like the closest I was ever going to get.' Jackie couldn't look at her. She just kept walking back and forth. It fucking stung, but at least it was a real answer, not just I don't know. Shauna kept talking, "Jackie, look. I'm not trying to justify it and I really don't want you to take it that way."

"Just be honest. I won't take it that way." Exactly what Shauna had told her over and over again all summer. Jackie was extending an olive branch, regardless of the anxiety building in her chest. Shauna smiled a little.

"You were always leaving pieces of yourself on him. I don't know if it was intentional or not. I don't think it really matters, but your lipstick or hickies on his neck, that hair tie he would keep on his wrist for you. Jackie... sometimes I could smell you on him... your perfume or, you know... other things too." Jackie turned and looked at her. She had no idea that Shauna had ever noticed that stuff, but it had absolutely been intentional. At least... some of it had been. It was never necessarily to hurt Shauna, but it made Jackie look better when everybody could visibly see that she was with Jeff. That was the kind of evidence that people would gossip about, and it was important for them to keep promoting the image that Jackie wanted them to. 'You guys would disappear for 20 minutes and I would know, but Jackie... baby, if I got close enough I could smell you on his fingers,' She spit the sentence out in jealousy and almost a whine. Shauna's eyes were dark again, and she made sure to hold eye contact with Jackie. "It drove me crazy knowing that he got to touch you. Knowing that you had been touching him. I lost myself in jealousy and self loathing. I wanted you so badly and I felt like I couldn't have you. It felt like my only other option was to try to hate you." Ouch. Jackie broke eye contact and turned around to face the wall.

“Did you?” Jackie asked. She felt exposed... vulnerable. “Hate me, I mean.” She felt her throat closing in and she could feel her face getting hot and her eyes starting to water. She was one wrong answer away from a breakdown.

Shauna paused, thinking about her answer. “I think I was very frustrated most of the time. I hated myself and I projected that onto you. I don’t think I could ever hate you, Jackie.” Jackie turned back around and they made eye contact again. Jackie sat back down next to her on the couch.

“I just don’t understand how you could hurt me like that, Shauna.” Jackie started to cry, and Shauna held her. It felt dumb to be crying about it now, but it felt fresh. It felt like she was back in Lottie’s living room and had just experienced all of it.

“I know, baby. I was so selfish. I saw only myself. I could only see my own pain. You were so... perfect, untouchable even. The you I was hurting was like a completely separate person than the you I had in my head. It doesn’t make sense, I know.” But it did, a little, Jackie thought. It was all so difficult to try to work through. It was hard. Everything that Shauna was saying aligned with the person she had always thought she was, but her actions just felt so foreign to Jackie. It felt like everything she had known might have actually been true, but she had spent the past year unable to let herself believe that.

“Jackie... I know you need time and space to work through stuff. I know that, but I need you to know that I want this. I don’t want to scare you away, but I will do anything. I want you.” Jackie leaned in and kissed her through her tears.

“I love you, Shauna. Just... I can’t right now. I think I would make myself sick wondering every night, or worse... I could hurt you somehow. Maybe this will make it better. I just don’t know. All I know is that I want to be your friend. Could we please be friends? I just can’t lose you.” Shauna nodded, and Jackie was relieved, but she still just felt so sick about the whole thing.

“Jackie, please don’t beat yourself up. You’ve been honest and transparent all summer. You’ve told me over and over again you don’t want a relationship, and I never did anything or acted on anything with the assumption that it would end up that way.” Jackie started to really cry now. Hot tears streamed down her face. “Baby, baby... calm down. How about this? Let’s set some rules okay? Real ones. Not the kind that we just ignore. You can call whenever. I will leave you my new number. No commitment, no expectations. Do whatever you need to do, and I will too. Nothing has to change, and we can be friends and you can take whatever time and space you need. Okay?”

Jackie nodded. She grabbed Shauna’s face and kissed her softly, gently. Shauna sighed and held onto her wrist. “I’m so sorry, Shauna.”

“Don’t be sorry. I want you in my life. I want to be able to call you with life updates. I want to be able to be around you without any of our old shit hanging in the air between us. If you need to be friends, then I want to be your friend. Nothing else. I’m okay with that.” Jackie nodded. She knew Shauna didn’t want to just be friends, but honestly, Jackie didn’t either. She was just grateful that she was open to it. As much as it sucked, it felt like they had better odds not blowing themselves up as friends than they did at a relationship.

“Okay. What rules should we set?” Jackie sniffled and straightened herself on the couch, trying to make herself feel better about it all.

Shauna sighed, “No fucking. No kissing. I need you to please stop looking at me the way that you do if you want me to stick to those rules, though.”

Jackie smiled, “Well you can’t dance on guys staring at me the whole time, putting on a show if you want me to follow the rules.” Shauna blushed and laughed.

“Okay. Let’s try to avoid being alone in rooms together when we’ve been drinking.” Jackie nodded.

“Okay. I think we can do this, yeah?” Shauna nodded and blinked away some tears in her eyes.

“Can we just lay here for a while?” Shauna asked.

Jackie nodded and laid them both down on the couch, holding Shauna tightly and running her fingers through her hair. Eventually, it was time for her to leave. Shauna stood up, kissed her goodbye and made sure Jackie had packed her number away. “We’ll be okay, Jax. I promise.” Jackie nodded and Shauna left. Jackie had ten minutes to grieve what felt like the very relationship she had been trying to avoid in the first place before Van and Tai picked her up to drive her up to school. They had decided it was a tradition to help Jackie move back to campus, and refused to let Jackie take the bus. Jackie tried to put on an act, but she was upset. It didn’t take long for Tai and Van to call her on it.

“Okay. I don’t buy this. What’s wrong?” Tai asked. Jackie shook her head.

“What did she say, babe?” Van asked. Of course they knew. There was only one person capable of getting to Jackie like this. She looked up and met Tai’s eyes.

“We talked about everything... about Jeff.”

“I thought you moved on? I thought you guys weren’t allowed to talk about it.” Van asked.

“Shauna thought that I was holding onto stuff. That I needed to talk about it to get past it.” Tai nodded, like she had been thinking the same thing.

“So, what did she say?” Tai asked.

“She said that she saw Jeff as an extension of me. She didn’t know that I was an option. She thought I was unattainable, and she knew she could manipulate Jeff. She told me that she saw my lipstick on his shirt or smelled my perfume on him and she couldn’t handle it. The only way to deal with it was to try to hate me, but that she knows now she just hated herself and was projecting it onto me.”

“How do you feel about all that?” Van asked.

“Right now? Numb. She said she loves me and she wants me to do whatever I need to to process everything, but I told her I wasn’t sure that I could ever do a relationship. I told her I wanted to just be friends.”

Tai nodded and Van looked at her, seeming a little unsure of how to respond. Tai spoke up, “I think we’re gonna stay tonight. Would that be okay?” Jackie teared up again and she hid

her face in her hands.

“Guys... I don’t want you to just put everything on hold. That isn’t what I was trying to do.”

“Jackie... we’re staying. You’re our girl. We want to make sure you’re okay. We’ve got nothing better to be doing.” Van said.

“Maybe we just don’t want to say goodbye yet,” Tai offered. ‘Not everything’s about you, Taylor.’ she joked. Jackie wanted to laugh, but just smiled and nodded her head against the window, trying to think of anything except for how she felt about any of it. Tai reached back and grabbed her leg, squeezing it reassuringly. “Let us be your friends, babe. It’s okay.” Jackie smiled again, holding her hand and squeezing it back. She spent the rest of the drive trying to do anything but think. Her head was pounding and she just wanted to go to sleep. Eventually, she did.

Chapter 30

Jackie and Renee's apartment was kind of a shit hole, but Jackie could afford it on her own. She didn't need help from her parents, she and Renee could live together, and it was right around the corner from Triangle, which was important too. It was perfect in its own way, and Jackie was beyond excited to decorate it. Renee had already moved in, so the current decor wasn't exactly Jackie's style, but Renee had already given up her design decision rights. They had moved Jackie's stuff into her bedroom, and her little futon into the living room. She had taken a few furniture pieces from her house, since her parents were selling it as is, and even though her house never really felt home, this new one she was creating was starting to feel more and more like it every second. Renee had been quietly observing her throughout the move in process and when they had finally settled in she walked into the living room with a vodka cran in hand.

"So... what's going on?" Renee asked cautiously. Tai and Van both looked at her, waiting to see what she would say. Jackie finished her drink and looked up at Renee, who looked a little scared.

"Shauna and I— we talked about some stuff. I really don't want to talk about it. I've been trying really hard to not think about it."

"So... we drink about it then?" Jackie smiled and handed her glass over to be refilled. When she left the room Van looked at her.

"Listen, I know I've got some shit going on so if I'm being a dick just tell me to shut up, but if I catch you handling this with liquor I'm going to fucking kill you."

Jackie smiled slightly and leaned her head on the girl's shoulder. "I won't, babe. Not like that." She felt defeated. She hated herself for not being able to get over it, and she blamed Shauna too for putting them here. Instead of just being together after high school, now Jackie had to feel like shit wondering if they would ever get back to where they had been. Tai sat on the couch on Jackie's other side and leaned into her. They spent the night drinking together, playing Jackie's favorite music, gossiping about who had been kicked out of the Triangle this summer. Jackie was having fun. She was going to miss her friends, the ones that were so amazing that they put all this effort into cheering her up, and the ones she had been lying to all summer. When they had to leave the next morning, they made her promise to call as often as possible. She agreed and went right back to bed.

The next day she started working, and the day after that she started her routine back up. Work, classes, and the Triangle. Her routine was good, and steady, but she didn't feel excited about anything. She was just going through the motions, the thought of Shauna with anyone but her a constant in her head. She had allowed it. If she had told her she didn't want her to be with anybody else, Shauna probably would have promised it, but it would be unfair when she knew how bad they would be together. They were friends. Jackie just had to give herself some time to get herself there. It took about a week for Renee to mention it again.

“Jackie... I know you said you didn’t want to think about it or talk about it or anything, but it feels like all you’re doing is thinking about it and maybe talking about it would help. I’m all for drink therapy, but Van did threaten my life, so...”

Jackie laughed. “I don’t know what to say, really.”

“Well, what happened? You started the conversation?”

She nodded, “Yeah. Had to. It felt like a break up.”

“What did you say?”

“I told her that I loved her but I couldn’t trust her. The thought of trying to trust her with no idea what’s going on at Brown... I mean... she had me that same day, and she still slept with somebody else. Now I’d be four hours away. Not to mention, I would be awful to be in a relationship with right now. I’ve been pushing any level of romance away for a reason.”

Renee nodded, “Yeah, I get that. So you told her that it was over completely?”

Jackie nodded her head, “I told her I thought we needed to be friends. She wanted to talk about Jeff. Wanted me to ask questions about him.”

“Oh. Okay. That makes sense. Did her answers help you?”

“I think so, maybe. I don’t know. I know that they were probably the best it was going to be, but I just can’t understand it. Her reasoning and the way she explained it was everything I always thought she was. But everything she did was just to hurt me, and that is the opposite of who I thought she was, so I’m just confused.”

“What did she say?”

“That Jeff was the closest thing to me she thought she was going to get, and that she projected her hate for herself onto me.” Renee looked like she wasn’t sure how to feel about that. She didn’t really know what to say. “We made rules. We’re really going to try to be friends. I just can’t lose her again, you know?”

Renee nodded. “Yeah, I get that.”

“I wish that I could know what I had to do to fix whatever is wrong with me.”

“So do you want to be with her, then?”

“I don’t know.”

“Well you said you’ve been hanging out with her more often, right? How has that been?”

“It’s been easy. It’s been comfortable and fun. But then I think about having to trust that she’s not sleeping with anybody else and I just get so sick about the whole thing.”

Renee nodded, “And now?”

“What do you mean?”

“Does it make you sick now?”

Jackie thought back to that night at the bar. That guy touching her. She got pissed off all over again. “Yeah, honestly it does. But I can’t be mad about it now. I’ll get over that, I think.

I just have to actually force myself to see her in a different way.”

Renee squinted at her, “Did you fuck her, Jack? That night at the bar. I just feel like I couldn’t have left those hickies, and you were looking ready to start a fight with that guy that night.”

Oh fuck. Jackie was caught. She smiled and blushed.

“I fucking knew it. I would never leave bruises that dark. That was crazy.”

“You can’t tell Tai or Van. Please.”

“They don’t know? Don’t they know everything?”

“They would be so pissed.”

“Maybe in the moment they would have been pissed, but now you had a conversation, you’re being mature and talking through your stuff. You’re doing all the right things, other than leaning on your friends who love you more than anything in this world.” Jackie started to cry a bit. She was such a fucking mess. “Seriously, Jack. You have the best friends in the world. They’re some of the best people I know.”

“I know, I know. I just don’t want to add to their plate.”

“Okay, well regardless. It might help you to follow your rules if other people knew about them.”

“Yeah,” Jackie laughed. ‘It probably would.’ Renee raised her eyebrows for Jackie to continue. “Well, basically not being drunk and alone together, trying to control the way we look at each other. That kind of stuff.”

Renee laughed at her. “Yeah that’s gonna be a challenge for y’all I think.

“What? Why?”

“You guys don’t have a clue what the fuck is going on most of the time when everybody’s hanging out. You’re always just watching each other. It’s sweet honestly, but I don’t even think you guys notice.”

“Well... we’re not doing that anymore.” Jackie said, trying to convince herself with the statement.

“Well you guys also drink like fucking drunks, so we’ll see how that first one goes.” Renee leaned on her jokingly and followed up before Jackie could think of something to say back. “Now that we’ve talked about it I feel like Van would be cool with me offering you a drink.”

“Yes please.” Renee moved into the kitchen to make her something. She had the night off and convinced Jackie to go to Triangle, and not to just sit and mope quietly at the bar like she had been, but actually dance and have fun. They got dressed, and Jackie let Renee do her makeup a little more alternative than Jackie would have done it, but Renee insisted it looked hot on her. They dressed in revealing clothes and walked to the bar. Renee queued up some of Jackie’s favorites and she spent the night not thinking about Shauna or her trust issues or anything else related to it. She had fun, she danced with other girls. She let a few of them kiss her, and she even made an attempt to hold a conversation with one of them too. That was

something she hadn't done ever, really. She figured the only way to heal was to throw herself in it. She and Renee stumbled back to their apartment at the end of the night laughing and enjoying themselves.

Jackie spent the next few weeks deciding to dive in. She and Shauna talked every day. It was comfortable and made Jackie happier than she'd care to admit to have the girl back in her life. At the end of the day, there was nobody that knew or understood Jackie the way that Shauna could, and she didn't have to wonder how Shauna was doing or call Lottie to try to ask discreetly. She could just ask. The two of them stayed true to their promises. They made a very clear effort to stay platonic. They tried very hard not to be flirty, and at first it was a little awkward, but after the first week or two it got easier. They were starting a new chapter, and they were doing it the right way. Jackie knew it was the right thing to do.

Chapter 31

Jackie started to really throw herself into work and school. She remembered how much she enjoyed it, and she was able to share it with Shauna at the end of each day, which was nice too. When she went to the Triangle, she started looking at the girls in a different light, toying with the idea of a date with one of them in her mind. She knew she had to do something different than she had been eventually, and all the girls were beautiful and funny and kind. They just didn't exactly feel right. Renee had taken to trying to set her up since the second Jackie mentioned she might be interested. She stalled for a few weeks, but eventually Renee pointed her toward a beautiful tall girl with long curls and tan skin. She had a really bright smile and was wearing a short black leather skirt and a white t-shirt. She really was beautiful. As Jackie watched her, the two other girls that were with her disappeared into the crowd.

"She's gorgeous, Jack. Come on. You gotta try something out at some point babe." Renee handed her a vodka cran and what Jackie assumed was the other girl's usual order and gave her an encouraging shove in the girl's direction. Jackie took a deep breath and headed over to the girl.

"Hey! Sorry, I know this is weird but my friend's the bartender," Jackie nodded her head at Renee, who was definitely watching the conversation. "She wanted me to deliver this to you. I guess they're slammed tonight." Jackie smiled and offered the girl her drink.

"Oh! Thank you! Not weird at all, seriously I appreciate it." Jackie watched the girl's eyes move over her face and then her body. It felt nice to be looked at. She smiled at the girl and she continued, "I'm Syd. You look really beautiful tonight."

Jackie blushed, "Thank you, Syd. I'm Jackie." Jackie took a sip of her drink, preparing herself to be a grown up and try to do something new. "Do you want to sit down? Maybe somewhere a little quieter?" Syd smiled at her and nodded. Jackie led the two of them to a little table in the corner of the bar, quiet enough to talk and secluded enough that Renee would maybe run her bar instead of staring at the two of them all night.

"I think I've seen you here before," Syd said as she sat down.

"I pretty much live here, so I don't doubt that," Jackie laughed. "Not in like an alcoholic way. The bartender's my roommate. This is kind of our spot."

"Oh, you're just roommates? I kind of assumed you guys were together."

"Oh, no. Definitely not together. Platonic roommates that live in a two bedroom." Syd nodded and smiled at Jackie. "Do you come here a lot?"

"Just when my friends decide they want to come out with me. This is the only bar they really feel safe at, you know?" Jackie followed her gaze to the girls she had seen with her earlier. They were laughing and dancing. Triangle was really the best place in the whole city. Stuff like that you just can't find anywhere else.

"Yeah, I get that. Do you go to Rutgers?"

“Yeah, I do. I’m studying Chemistry.”

“Oh, wow. That sounds...”

Syd cut her off, “Awful? Yeah, it kind of is.” She laughed and reached out to grab Jackie’s wrist as she did. Jackie laughed too. “I love it though. What about you?”

“I’m doing Marketing. I really didn’t think I’d be as into it as I am, but it’s kind of great.”

“That’s really great, Jackie. It fits you honestly. I bet you’re good at it.” Jackie smiled.

“Thank you.” Jackie held eye contact for a while before conversation picked back up. They hung out and talked and flirted for a half hour or so until Syd’s friends stumbled over to the table and made it very clear they were tapping out for the night. Syd looked at Jackie a little nervous and almost panicked. “I wanna give you my number. I don’t have a pen.”

“Oh, don’t even worry.” Jackie stood up and walked behind the bar, grabbing a pen from the cup on the register and then walked back over to Syd, handing her the pen and offering her hand for her to write on. Syd wrapped her left hand around Jackie’s and used her right to write down her phone number. She finished the digits with a small heart and looked up at Jackie with a smile.

She handed her the pen back and said, “Call me. Seriously. I had a lot of fun tonight.”

“Yeah, me too.” Jackie smiled as the three girls made their way through the crowd and out the front door. She spent the rest of the night at the bar chatting with Renee whenever it died down enough. They made their way back together around 3:30.

“So... are you gonna give me the details or what?” Renee asked.

“I mean, there isn’t a bunch to say. She was nice.” Jackie shrugged.

“You let her give you her number, though. Actually, if I remember correctly you put in some effort so that she could give it to you.” Renee smiled and tilted her head at her.

“I don’t know, Re. I feel like I went out of my comfort zone just talking to her like that. I did the thing, so now I don’t feel like I need to do a bunch more and go on a date or call or anything.”

Renee rolled her eyes, “Oh come on, Jack!”

“What! Why would I call when I don’t even really like her like that?”

“Do you think that you just meet somebody and immediately fall head over heels?” Well... that’s pretty much what happened when she met Shauna. Renee read her facial expression and continued, “You call her so that you can figure out if you like her like that because she’s pretty and nice and you were able to hold a conversation with her without running for the hills.”

“Ugh... I don’t want to talk about this.” Jackie laughed, trying to think of how to change the subject. “If I have to go on dates and shit why don’t you? I mean, you never call anybody that leaves their number for you. You never hang out with anybody a second time.”

“That’s different.”

“What? How is that any different?”

“Because I say it’s different.” Jackie laughed and gave her a friendly shove as they made their way to their apartment door.

“That is so unfair. How about this? I’ll call this girl as soon as you call somebody who gives you their number. I’ll write it down and the next time you get hit on, if you call I will too.”

Renee rolled her eyes playfully, but it was clear she didn’t love this deal Jackie was trying to make. “If you’re tired of dancing with me and shit you could just say that.” Renee tried her best to hold a straight face but it didn’t last long before the two girls erupted into drunken laughter.

“Says the one who spends every night trying to set me up with somebody.”

Renee pulled out her key and opened the door. “You need some guidance, seriously I’m doing you a favor. You spent all last year doing this on your terms, now it’s time. You need to be pushed out of your little nest ASAP.” Jackie laughed harder and headed for the kitchen to grab some water. “Fly baby bird, fly,” Renee said as she walked straight to her bedroom and crashed, shutting the door behind her without a word. Jackie made her way to her own bedroom, laughing quietly and shaking her head. She looked down at her hand and more specifically, the phone number written on it. She didn’t know how to feel. She wasn’t necessarily drawn to the girl, but she was pretty and it was nice to talk to her. Maybe Renee was right and she needed to put some effort into this whole moving on thing, but really she just didn’t feel like it. Instead, everything in her slightly tipsy brain was telling her to call Shauna. It was late, but Shauna would be up. She was always up at this time writing or reading or just unable to sleep. Jackie grabbed a pad of sticky notes out of her desk drawer and wrote Syd’s name and number down, planning to stay true to the deal that Renee never actually accepted. Then, she dialed Shauna’s number. One of the first things Jackie did when she moved in was tape the number to the phone itself, just in case she ever forgot it, but she had memorized it within days. She listened to the phone ring, excited at the anticipation of Shauna’s voice on the other end.

“Jackie?” Of course she knew who it was. Nobody else would be calling at 4 in the morning. Shauna’s voice was gravelly and deep, like she hadn’t spoken in hours.

“Hey, Shipman. Sorry, did I wake you?”

“No, no. I was just finishing up a writing assignment. I’m glad you called, you’ve got some good timing Jax.”

“Oh yeah? What are you writing about?”

“Just something for class, a Dickinson analysis.”

“Right... right. Whatever that is.” Shauna laughed on the other end, immediately making Jackie’s face feel hot and drawing a smile from her lips.

“It’s poetry. You really should read it, honestly. I know it isn’t your thing, but I think you’d like it.”

“Hmm... maybe I will.”

“What were you up to tonight? Renee working?”

“Yeah, she was. It was busy tonight, typical Friday I guess but there were a lot of people I don’t usually see there. It was kind of weird.”

“Oh, I’m sorry.”

“No, it was probably good, I guess.” Jackie glanced down at Syd’s phone number, unsure of what exactly she meant by it. This would be something that she could talk to her friend about right? It just didn’t seem right, didn’t feel right. “For the bar, I mean. Re got good tips, too.”

“I’m surprised you don’t just get a job there, honestly. You’re there all the time.”

“I’d need a valid 21 year old ID for that job, I think.”

“Oh, right. I forgot you’ve been breaking the law every day for the past year.”

“Oh, whatever Shipman. Like you don’t also have a fake.” Shauna laughed into the phone. It felt good to joke back and forth with her like nothing had ever gone wrong between them. It filled Jackie’s heart in a way she hadn’t realized she had missed.

“I don’t use it nearly as much as you do.”

“Okay, fair fair.” Jackie conceded.

“Any reason for this late night call? Did something happen?” Shauna asked. It was casual, but Jackie thought that she probably had been curious since the phone rang about her reasoning.

“No, no. I’m okay. I just missed you I guess.” Jackie stuttered over her words, unsure of how else to answer the question.

Shauna sighed into the phone. “I miss you too.” There it was. That weight. The weight of what those I miss you’s actually meant. It was time to hang up the phone and go back to their unassuming, very platonic friendship. Jackie faked a yawn and Shauna took the hint or maybe bought the act and said, “You should go to bed. I know you can sleep in tomorrow or whatever, but it’s pretty early.”

“Yeah, you’re probably right. Goodnight, Shipman.”

“Goodnight, Jax. Thanks for calling.”

“Thanks for picking up.” Shauna let out a short breath, not quite a laugh but not quite a sigh and Jackie hung up the phone. She looked back at Syd’s phone number and couldn’t tell if she was more or less drawn to it now, but it somehow seemed to mean more than it had a few minutes ago. On one hand, the interaction made her realize that this Syd girl wasn’t going to fulfill her the way one phone call with Shauna had, but on the other, that interaction made it very clear that moving forward was going to require more than what her current plan of absolutely nothing had been. She went to bed physically, mentally, and emotionally exhausted from the evening. It didn’t take long before she felt herself fall fast asleep.

Chapter 32

Jackie spent the next day trying to bury herself in schoolwork. She called Shauna every time she got too bored or felt uninspired, knowing she would be doing the same thing. Renee didn't have to work on Saturday and didn't feel like going out to the bar, so she sat on Jackie's bed while Jackie worked on her product assessments.

"Who knew marketing was actually hard?" Renee said, laying on her back staring at Jackie's ceiling.

"Not me. Otherwise I don't know if I would've picked it."

"Oh bullshit. You like doing all this homework all the time." Renee laughed.

"Speaking of homework... Do you ever do any of it?" Jackie turned and smiled at the other girl as she sat up in bed with her jaw hung open.

"Wow, Jack. You know... I write sometimes."

"Never. Actually not once this semester."

"If you want me to graduate and leave you then you could just say that."

Jackie rolled her eyes, not allowing Renee the satisfaction of backpedaling. "You know, for the first time you don't want to go out on a Saturday, and you're still here... not writing. I'm just saying." Renee laughed and shook her head, clearly unsure of how to defend herself. Jackie continued, "Honestly, I think you're just staying in so that you don't have to risk getting somebody's number and living out our little deal."

Renee laughed again and tilted her head at Jackie. "You know... if you want to call the girl you don't need some bet to do it. You could just do it on your own." Jackie waved her off and started her homework again. "Jack, seriously. Have you been thinking about it?"

Jackie put her pencil down and turned around to give Renee her full attention. "I don't know. Maybe?"

"Why not then? Clearly you're intrigued. It can't hurt." Jackie raised her eyebrows and looked away. It could hurt. Sure, maybe it could hurt her, but really she was more worried about it hurting Shauna. Jackie knew that being friends was the right call for them, and the past few weeks have proven that. Things have been good, but if she started dating then maybe they wouldn't be. That scared her.

"I don't know... I think I'm intrigued by the thought of doing something new. It feels wrong to go on a date with somebody when I know that I'm not doing it because of interest in them."

"Jackie, bro. It's a first date, she's not in love with you." Jackie threw her head back and laughed.

"Well when you say it like that I look a little self absorbed."

“Nah... you’re not self absorbed, you just get ahead of yourself. It’s kinda your thing.”

“You really think I should call?”

Renee leaned closer to her, “I really do.” Their faces were close, and Jackie realized that there was no tension whatsoever. She thought about it, and really there hadn’t been any for some time. Anything they had done had been out of habit more than anything else, and anything more than that hadn’t happened since that night with Shauna. “What are you thinking about?”

“The alarming lack of tension, actually. Have you noticed it? I didn’t even realize that we weren’t really doing that stuff anymore.”

Renee laughed, “Girl I spent like 20 seconds with Shauna and knew it was gone. Like capital G-O-N-E, gone. The second you got us in the same room you knew.” Jackie felt her face fall. She hoped she hadn’t been cruel or anything. She didn’t even know.

“Re—”

“Oh, god no. Please none of that. I’m the one that stopped initiating. Honestly, at the time I thought y’all were definitely getting back together. Felt wrong to be in the way, but now it’s just like... old I guess?” That made Jackie feel better, but what was that about her thinking they were getting together? Renee continued before Jackie could question it, “We’re growing up... maturing or whatever. I think it’s good, don’t you?”

“Yeah, yeah, yeah whatever. What was that? About me and Shauna?”

“Oh, god Jack. Please. Just go back to your homework.”

“No, no. Explain.”

“I don’t know. Neither of you were even a little bit in control of yourselves. It was ridiculous. It felt inevitable.” Hmm. She was probably right. It made Jackie feel better about the decision to keep it platonic. Doing things because they’re out of control and can’t see past anything but each other isn’t a good way to start any kind of relationship. Jackie slowly nodded her head.

“Do your homework, nerd. Stop thinking.” Renee fell back on the bed and continued staring at the ceiling. Jackie laughed and threw an eraser at her before turning around and trying to refocus. Maybe this date wasn’t such a terrible idea? Maybe trying to figure out what a relationship is like when she was actually in control. She found herself looking at Syd’s phone number more than her homework and eventually gave up on it. She turned back to Re.

“So... how would you feel using that nifty little car you’ve got to go get some pizzas? I’ll pay.” Jackie put on a pleading smile and Renee jumped up from the bed.

“Deal. I need something to do anyway.” She went into Jackie’s purse and grabbed her wallet on her way out, “Tell Shauna I say hi,” she yelled on her way out the front door. Jackie laughed. She was right obviously, Jackie had been wanting to call her, but she didn’t need to make Jackie seem so predictable. Even so, she dialed the number. Shauna picked up immediately.

“Shauna.” Jackie laughed. She was clearly distracted, probably reading. “Oh, Jax. Hey, sorry.”

“No, you’re good. You reading?” Jackie answered, very aware of the idiotic smile on her face.

“Yeah, yeah. I’m good though. I can talk.”

“Dickinson again?”

“Yeah, actually. You remembered?”

“Of course I did. I grabbed a copy at the library actually.”

“Wow... I’m touched actually, Jax. That’s so sweet.”

“You should be,” Jackie joked, “I don’t think I’ve ever been in a library before.”

Shauna laughed at the joke. “So... what did you think of it?”

“Oh, no. I haven’t actually read it yet, but it is sitting right here on my desk, just in case.” Jackie picked up the book and turned it over in her hand. It made her feel closer to Shauna, even if she had no real desire to read it.

“Oh, my god,” Shauna laughed into the phone and Jackie caught herself smiling again. “That poor book is never going to see that library again.”

“It’s living a very glamorous life over here, actually. No greasy grimy hands pulling at the pages. Really, the book should be more appreciative.”

“Whatever you say, babe. What have you been up to?”

“I was just doing some homework. Re ran out for some pizza, I thought I’d see how your night was going.”

“I’m just doing pretty much the same thing I’m always doing,” Shauna laughed. “I’m surprised you guys are staying in.”

“Yeah, Re said she didn’t feel like going out, but she’s lying honestly.”

“Why would she lie about that?” Oh fuck. That wasn’t very smart. Well, they were friends right? This didn’t have to be weird.

“Oh... well, um. I think she’s scared that somebody will give her their number. We kind of have this deal.”

Shauna took her time before responding to that. “So... what’s the deal?”

It was awkward. It was very awkward, and Jackie had no idea how to deliver the line she had set herself up for. “Well this girl gave me her number, and Renee wants me to call, but I said I’d only do it when she did.” Silence. Complete silence on the line. Shauna cleared her throat, and then more silence. “Shauna?”

“Yeah, sorry. I’m here.”

Jackie was waiting for something more, but it wasn’t coming. All she heard was a sigh. “I’m sorry, I don’t even know why I mentioned it.”

“No, Jax. You should call.” Shauna’s voice sounded bitter, but then it softened, “Seriously, I’m your friend. I want you to talk to me. There’s no reason why you shouldn’t call.”

Now it was Jackie’s turn to be at a loss for words. At this point, the conversation was more dead space than actual talking, and it was a little heartbreaking. “Shauna—” she still had nothing to say. The girl’s name was the only thing she could muster.

“I, um... I actually have to go. I think Lottie and Nat just got back from dinner.”

“Yeah, yeah. Sorry I didn’t mean to keep you.” Jackie was a little disappointed and also a little relieved that this conversation wouldn’t be so painful anymore.

“No problem, bye Jax.” Shauna hung up the phone before Jackie got the chance to respond. It was enough to make it very clear homework was not happening. Jackie stood up and fell backwards into her bed, staring at the same wall Renee had somehow found so entertaining all afternoon. She genuinely considered just throwing the number out. She didn’t think hurting Shauna would be worth it, but deep down Jackie knew that going on this date would probably be more productive than not. Progress is uncomfortable and she knew that. Maybe this was the step they needed to finally beat the awkwardness. Maybe.

Chapter 33

It took two shifts for Renee to get somebody's phone number. Jackie had stayed in to work on some homework and of course, call Shauna. Renee barged into her bedroom when Jackie was dead asleep, jumping on her bed and shoving a receipt in her face.

"Looks like somebody's going on a date!" She yelled.

"Re, I love you, but it is like three in the morning."

"Oh, whatever. Don't be a sore loser." Renee jumped up again and landed on her butt, shaking the whole bed in the process.

"So you're gonna call the girl?" Jackie asked. Renee shrugged and looked back at the phone number.

"If it gets you to expand your horizons, sure. I'm not much of a date person, but I'll probably get a drink with her."

"Okay, so does that mean I can just invite Syd to the bar while you're working?"

"No. It does not mean that."

"What? That's so unfair."

"Don't know what to tell you, love. You're gonna get dinner. Or lunch would probably work too."

Jackie laughed and rolled her eyes. "Who's getting ahead of themselves now?" Renee laughed and stood up.

"Okay, whatever. Either way, you're calling tomorrow. Goodnight." Without another word, Renee turned and exited the bedroom, and before Jackie could even think about the phone call she was supposed to make she fell right back to sleep.

The next morning, Jackie woke up at 8, made her coffee, and headed to work. The same routine she did every Wednesday. She had one class after work and then usually called Shauna, made ramen and did homework until it was acceptably late enough to go to the bar. Now, she had to stray from her routine. Instead of her usual call to Shauna, she was going to call Syd. Jackie thought about calling Shauna first, but the last few days had been much less awkward, primarily due to the fact both of them were ignoring how weird it had gotten between them when Jackie mentioned the phone number. Calling Shauna now would just make Jackie more nervous than she already was. Jackie realized that she had never really done this. She spent all of high school perfectly manipulating the boys in her grade and the grades above her into calling her and asking her out, and obviously Shauna had been... Shauna. It was uncomfortable, more so than she had been expecting. Before she could overthink it, Jackie dialed the number and held the phone up to her ear, listening to it ring. She didn't have the same excited feeling she did when she was waiting for Shauna to answer her calls, instead it was a bundle of nerves in the pit of her stomach.

“Syd Cade. Who’s this?” It was loud in the background, Jackie recognized Toni Braxton’s voice but couldn’t really make out the song.

“Hey... um—” Jackie was stuttering, this was kind of awful actually, but she continued, “It’s Jackie from the bar last weekend.”

“Oh my god, hey!” She sounded genuinely excited to hear back from her. It made Jackie feel a little guilty for not calling sooner, and also for calling at all. It was hard to set aside her guilt for getting the girl’s hopes up.

“Hi! Yeah, I’m so sorry I didn’t call sooner. Honestly, I think I was a little nervous,” Jackie felt the truth fall out of her mouth before she could stop herself. That was embarrassing. “Sorry... that was lame.”

Syd laughed into the phone, “No, it’s not really. So, why’d you call? Was there something you wanted to ask me or?” Syd was teasing her, knowing how obviously nervous Jackie was to even be on the phone with her. Jackie felt her face get hot, a little embarrassed. It was kind of fun though. This was the first date she would go on that would be kind of authentic.

“Yes, actually,” Jackie said, regaining her composure, “I wanted to know if you’d want to get lunch with me tomorrow? On me, of course. I want to see you again.”

Syd took a while to respond before Jackie heard her say, “I would really like that. Does 1 work? We could do that deli across the street from the bar?”

“Yeah, that sounds great! I’ll see you then,” Jackie hung up the phone and realized that she was smiling. She bit her lip to try to suppress it but it was no help. She was excited, which was honestly a little unexpected but she decided to let it be a good thing, and not to let her nervousness or worries about Shauna get in the way of something that could be fun.

Jackie called Shauna, but kept it pretty surface level. She was careful not to mention the date at all, but knew that eventually it was going to have be something they talked about. That was the whole point of the date, afterall. Wasn’t it supposed to help them move past the awkwardness? Jackie was going to have to let it if they had even a chance at normalcy.

The next day, Jackie woke up an hour earlier than usual, making sure to actually make breakfast and take her time on her makeup. She wore something that she knew she looked good in, but was subtle enough that it could be played off as work clothes. When she walked into the deli, she saw Syd at a table in the back corner, watching reruns of a basketball game on the tv behind the counter. Jackie fixed her hair, took a deep breath and walked over to her.

“Syd! Hey! So good to see you.” Jackie leaned in for a hug, which was surprisingly not awkward, and Syd greeted her back. They walked up to the counter and ordered their food, which Jackie paid for, even though Syd insisted it wasn’t necessary. Her insistence continued all the way back to their table.

“Seriously, you didn’t have to do that. I wanted to come, I wouldn’t have minded paying.”

“I asked you. I’m not letting you pay, don’t be ridiculous.” Syd smiled at her softly and thanked her. She was really sweet.

“I’m glad you called. I wasn’t sure you were going to.” Syd looked up at her over her food.

“Why wouldn’t I call?”

“Well, I’ve just heard from a friend of a friend that you’re a little hard to get a call from.”

Jackie smiled and tilted her head. The reputation she had and the thought of everybody talking about her gave her a familiar ego rush. She set the ego aside and decided to go with honesty, “Well... yeah. I can definitely see where that comes from. Honestly, I just haven’t been super into dating since I got to college. Just never really felt like the right time.”

“Yeah I get that. I’ve kinda been in the same boat I guess. Is it now? The right time, I mean.” Syd avoided eye contact as she finished the sentence, uncomfortable with slight vulnerability in the question. Jackie took a bite before answering, giving her enough time to figure out how she wanted to respond. This felt nice, healthy even to get out of her circle. She devoted so much time to considering Shauna’s feelings and stressing herself out over it when she had been the one to mess up and start the whole ordeal. It was time for Jackie to at least be open to something new. There was nothing wrong with that.

“Yeah, I think it is.” Jackie smiled and Syd smiled back. Lunch was fun. Jackie learned that Syd was on the women’s basketball team, something that Jackie knew nothing about, but Syd seemed excited about Jackie being the captain of her high school soccer team. It was a cool fun fact for sure, but compared to the division one athlete majoring in chemistry, it seemed pretty dull. Syd was beyond impressive, and Jackie wanted so badly to be drawn to her, but she just wasn’t. She wanted to be friends with the girl, she wanted to hang out with her at the bar, but she didn’t want to date her. The longer the lunch went on, the more clear that was to the both of them. Realistically, they had very little in common. They were gay, and they both played a sport in high school. Other than that there was pretty much nothing. They hugged goodbye and Jackie walked back to the apartment.

She was shocked to see Renee writing in the living room. It was so bizarre that Jackie didn’t even want to bother her, but Renee heard the door shut and turned around. Her face lit up, “Jackie! How did it go? Tell me all the details!”

“No, no. You’re writing. That’s important.”

Renee waved her off, “I’m not anymore. It’s fine. Catch me up!”

“I don’t have a bunch of time. I have class at four, but it was okay. I really did have fun, but it didn’t feel like a second date type of thing.”

“Oh no. What happened?”

“Nothing happened. She was great, super impressive actually, but I just didn’t feel like there was anything more than friendship there.”

“Oh, bummer.” Renee turned back around and started writing again, and Jackie was aware that she was no longer entertaining enough for a distraction. Jackie laughed and grabbed her backpack before heading back out the door and walking to her class. By the time she got back and had eaten dinner, Renee had left for her shift at the bar. Jackie was taking the night off of her homework, and decided to call Shauna. She felt that familiar rush as the phone dialed, reaffirming that Syd wasn’t the one that would help her get over all of this stuff.

“Hello, this is Shauna.”

“Shauna! Hey, it’s Jackie.”

When Shauna would have usually said, Jackie! Hey! It's so good to hear from you!, she said, "Oh, hi Jackie. What's up? Did you need something?" It made Jackie's heart sink in her chest.

"Um— no I didn't need anything. I was just saying hi."

"Oh, okay... Well, hi." Shauna gave a short, ingenuine laugh into the phone and Jackie felt her mood sour.

"Are you okay?"

"Yeah, I'm good. I actually have to go. I'm kind of behind schedule."

"Oh, okay. What are you late for?"

"Just grabbing dinner. Maybe I can call later?"

"Like just going to pick it up? You know you can call anytime."

"Okay, cool. I'll try to call later then, okay?"

"Yeah, sure." Before Jackie could say goodbye, Shauna had hung up the phone. She was late getting dinner? That sounded like a date. Jackie didn't miss the way Shauna avoided her question about takeout. It definitely sounded like a date, but there was also a chance Jackie was projecting. She could just be freaking out about Shauna because deep down, she felt guilty herself. Even if she was going on a date right now... well, no. Jackie just couldn't bring herself to think about that, and didn't really want to either. Instead, she got dressed and took herself to the bar to meet Re.

Chapter 34

Jackie walked in and was greeted immediately with a shot of vodka and a very strong vodka cran. Apparently Re just had a feeling she could use a little extra tonight, and she was right because Shauna was on a date right now.

“Oh, god. Thank you, thank you.” Jackie took the shot, chased it with a sip of her drink. “Another, please?”

“Oh, wow. Yeah... okay.” Renee’s eyes lingered on her with concern as she poured another shot. “What’s going on?”

“Well... I think Shauna is on a date right now.”

“Okay? You were on a date earlier.” Renee placed the shot glass in front of her and Jackie took it without hesitating.

“I went on a lunch date, she’s going on a dinner date. There’s a difference.”

“I mean... food at noon or food at seven. I’m not really seeing the big difference.” Renee did in fact see the difference, everybody knows there’s a difference. Jackie rolled her eyes.

“Lunch dates are like... jeans and a shirt, maybe when it’s over you schedule a dinner date. Dinner dates are nice dresses and maybe when it’s over you go back to the apartment together.”

Renee squinted at Jackie, trying to figure out what type of honesty Jackie could handle. “So obviously I do know why you’re upset, so don’t think I’m being dense but... you guys are just friends, right?” Jackie rolled her eyes and nodded before taking another sip of her drink, ‘which is something that you asked for,’ Jackie took another sip of her drink and Renee continued, “and you went on a date first...”

Jackie quickly finished off her drink before responding, “Yeah, whatever. I didn’t fuck anybody.”

Renee started pouring her another, “Neither did she!”

Jackie glared at the girl, “Yet.” Renee rolled her eyes.

“Maybe you need to fuck somebody. This is crazy, Jackie. You want to be friends with the girl then be her friend!” Jackie knew she was right, but the thought of Shauna sleeping with somebody else made her sick. She clearly needed to get over it though, fast. Renee got called over to the other end of the bar and Jackie made her way to the dance floor. She found a girl with short brown hair, pale skin and black lipstick. She immediately locked eyes with Jackie and looked her up and down. Jackie made her way over, ready to do anything to forget about Shauna and everything she could be doing at that moment. Was she kissing them? Had they made their way back to her place yet? Jackie wrapped her arms around the girl’s shoulders and smiled brightly, dancing with the loud music. They didn’t even need to speak to each other, the girl smiled back and danced with her, wrapping her arms around Jackie’s waist. She

took complete control of their movements, and before Jackie knew it they were dancing with their bodies pressed flush against each other, it was hot in the bar and Jackie's hair was starting to stick to her face. She was fucked up and felt invincible. The girl's hands gripped Jackie's hips and turned her around, wrapping around her stomach and holding her even closer than they were before. Jackie leaned her head back and the girl started to kiss her neck.

"You are so fucking hot," the girl spoke into her ear. Jackie almost moaned, all her pent up emotion starting to bubble up in the heat of the moment. Instead, she laughed and pressed her ass against the girl's thighs. She felt her hands wander down her hips and her fingertips pressing into her upper thighs. Jackie turned around and kissed her, hard. She grabbed the girl's face and felt her hands gripping her ass. It felt wrong, but Jackie was dead set on making it feel right. She pushed her tongue into the girl's mouth and felt her smile as they made out. It still wasn't right, and Jackie felt herself start to get angry about it. The girl pulled away from her and kissed her neck, moving up to her ear and whispering, "Bathroom?" Jackie nodded and allowed herself to be led to the unisex bathroom.

It was dingy, and probably really gross, especially if Renee was the one responsible for making sure it was clean, but it was clear that this girl Jackie had met had no care for any of that. She locked the door and pushed Jackie up against it, moving her hands under Jackie's shirt, feeling the skin on her stomach. It felt good to be touched like this again, to be wanted in that way by somebody with no baggage. Jackie kissed her back, returning her intensity and wrapped a leg around the girl's ass, holding her tight. As the makeout deepened, the girl's hands made their way up to Jackie's bra, squeezing her tits in all the right places, and Jackie reached around to grab the girl's ass, wanting so badly to find the desire to go further than this makeout. Maybe Renee was right, and she needed to fuck somebody, but this just wasn't going to be it. Jackie moved her hands away and pulled her head back. The girl started to kiss down her neck and Jackie pushed her gently.

"I'm sorry... I just can't do this." She removed her hands from underneath Jackie's shirt and just looked at her, probably surprised that Jackie pulled away so abruptly. Jackie unlocked the door and walked out, letting it close behind her. She felt how drunk she had been when she started walking back to Renee at the bar, and Renee was kind enough to have a diet coke ready for her when she got there.

"Are you okay?"

"Of course, why wouldn't I be okay?"

Renee laughed, "Oh, no reason. You headed home?"

"Maybe in a minute. I kinda just want to sit for a second." Renee nodded and continued serving drinks. She sat down at the bar and sipped on her diet coke, wallowing in her obsession over what Shauna had been up to. They would definitely be back in her room by now. It was late. She had said she'd call Jackie later, but Jackie was sure that she would be much too busy for that. Much too busy for Jackie. She didn't even notice someone had sat down next to her.

"You good, baby?" Jackie looked up and saw a pretty blonde, with a sly grin and bright blue eyes so pretty Jackie's drunken gaze got lost in them. Her hair was messy but so perfectly styled that it kind of blew Jackie's mind.

“Oh I’m great, it’s not even midnight and I’m drinking a diet coke trying to sober myself up.” The girl laughed and Jackie found herself laughing too.

“So what’s up? Spill. I could use a good story.” Jackie smiled and looked at her, trying to figure out how much to tell. Then, she started to think about Shauna on her date and the smile melted off of her face.

“It’s not much of a story, really,” The girl cocked her head at an angle, trying to get Jackie to continue. Jackie rolled her eyes with a smile and gave in, “The girl I would have done anything to be with for most of my life is on a date with somebody else tonight, and I can’t figure out how to feel anything for anybody but her.”

“Yikes. That is pretty tough.” Jackie raised her eyebrows and took another sip of her soda, she continued, with a more genuine tone, “I’m sorry, really.”

Jackie smiled and looked at the girl. She really was pretty. “What’s your name?”

“Charlie. You?”

“Jackie.” She smiled. “So, what’s your story?”

“Oh, well me personally, I am not sobering up at 11 pm.” She laughed and Jackie smiled.

“You are alone at a bar on a Wednesday night at 11 pm, though. Come on, there’s got to be something.” Jackie prodded her, poking her hand with her finger.

Charlie laughed. “I got out of a 5 year relationship last night.” Her face sunk, and Jackie understood the feeling. “I think my whole life just blew up over nothing.”

Jackie grabbed the girl’s hand. She was so sad, and Jackie just wanted to make her feel better. “I’m sorry.” Charlie shook her head, clearly not looking for sympathy. Jackie let go of her hand and rolled with it. “So what are you here for? Distracting yourself or trying to meet people?”

“Definitely the first... maybe the second if I found someone.” Charlie looked Jackie up and down and smiled, Jackie returned it.

“And have you?” Jackie leaned in a little closer, and Charlie did too.

“Maybe...” Charlie licked her lips, drawing Jackie’s eyes to them. Jackie moved closer to close the gap and Charlie gently held her in place by putting her hand on her collarbone. “But she’s had one too many, and I’m not an asshole.” She grinned, knowing how much of a tease she was being. Jackie laughed and pulled away to find Renee standing in front of her, refilling her soda. Jackie smiled. Renee, always taking care of her.

“Re! This is Charlie, Charlie this is my roommate Renee.” They smiled at each other and dove into some conversation that Jackie was struggling to listen in on. Instead, she caught herself looking at Charlie’s eyes and her lips, comparing them to Shauna’s and thinking about if Charlie could be different than that girl she had tried to make out with in the bathroom. Renee excused herself, sliding Jackie a pen with a wink before walking away. Jackie laughed, holding the pen up for Charlie to see.

Charlie laughed, “Quite the wingwoman you’ve got there.”

Jackie smiled and uncapped the pen, “She really is the best.” Jackie reached out and grabbed Charlie’s hand, jotting down her number. ‘Just in case you think you found somebody.’ Charlie smiled at her and rolled her eyes. “Go dance, baby. Distract yourself. Point number one, remember?”

“You gonna be alright?” Charlie asked.

“Oh yeah, I’m just gonna head home I think. My bed sounds really nice right now.” All of a sudden Renee was back in front of her.

“You’re gonna walk back by yourself?” It wasn’t the first time Jackie had gone home early, but this was probably the first time she had been this drunk by 11 and not closed out the bar. She was pretty confident she could walk around the corner, though. The concern was a little unnecessary.

“I’m fine, Re. It’s not far.”

“I don’t know, Jack. Maybe I can get somebody to close for me and I can walk you home.”

Jackie scoffed, “You’re gonna call somebody in at 11pm so that you can walk me half a mile?”

Charlie cut in and Jackie had forgotten she was even there. “I could walk with you.”

Renee looked her up and down suspiciously, but Jackie just pointed at her. It was a good idea, and Renee was not going to leave the bar. That would be ridiculous. “Are you sure?”

“Yeah, really. It’s no problem.” Charlie waved Renee off, and Jackie could tell she didn’t love the idea, but she wasn’t really left with many other options so she caved.

“Okay, but if I find out you’re some kind of axe murderer or something I will actually fucking kill you.”

Charlie held out her pinky finger, “I swear I’m not.” Renee locked pinkies with her and Charlie led Jackie out of the bar and onto the street. The cool air felt nice on her face, and Jackie was content just walking in silence for a while.

“Thank you for walking me. I really do think I would’ve been fine, but I appreciate you offering. It’s sweet.”

“It’s no problem, I couldn’t have let you walk home alone.” Jackie smiled to herself and turned into her apartment entrance. Charlie followed her up the stairs and into her room. Jackie didn’t even think to question it, everything felt so comfortable with her. Charlie walked into their kitchen and filled a cup with water, handing it to Jackie and ordering her to finish it. Jackie complied and went to find tylenol to prep for the next morning.

“So, which one’s your room? I gotta see this girl you speak of.”

“Yes, great idea. Let’s go find Shauna.” Jackie led Charlie into her bedroom and beelined to her favorite picture of the girl. She kept it on her desk. Shauna was sitting by the fire, laughing at something Jackie had said. Lottie had taken the picture last summer, and she was wearing that red dress that Jackie loved on her. They had gone out to a bar and headed home early to drink in Lottie’s backyard. Shauna looked so genuine and kind in that picture, every

time Jackie looked at it she smiled. Jackie held the frame in her hand for a second before handing it over to Charlie.

“She’s pretty.” Charlie said it genuinely, with a smile, and Jackie knew that it was because it was true. Shauna was genuinely the most beautiful girl she had ever seen.

“She really is.” Jackie smiled.

“You guys still talk, then?”

“It’s a long story. We’re trying out the whole platonic friends thing.”

Charlie nodded, “Not going well I take it?” Jackie looked over at the answering machine, remembering Shauna’s promise to call her.

“Let’s see.” Jackie walked over and checked for messages she would’ve missed. It was late enough now that if she made it back to her room after her date she would’ve already called. ‘She told me she’d call tonight, but I’m kinda guessing that isn’t going to happen.’ Jackie pressed the button on the machine and it displayed a big fat 0. “Yeah, that tracks.”

“I’m sorry.”

“No, it’s probably for the best. Friends are supposed to be allowed to go on dates.”

“Yeah, still sucks though. I couldn’t imagine if Candace was out on a date tonight” Jackie nodded and Charlie grabbed her cup out of her hand, refilled it and handed it back to her.

“How would you feel if she had met somebody at a bar and walked them home after?” Jackie joked, Charlie looked up and smiled at her. She shook her head and decided not to share more, which Jackie respected.

“I’m gonna head home, but you should finish that and go to bed. There’s still a chance you get to class tomorrow.” Jackie laughed and thanked her again before walking her to the door and passing out in her bed.

She spent the next day obsessing over this date. Shauna never called, all that was on the answering machine in the morning was a message from Charlie giving her phone number and letting her know she made it home safely. By 7 pm, Jackie was losing her mind. Renee had told her she needed to relax, and poured her a glass of wine that immediately went to her head. By 10:30, Jackie was dialing the phone.

“Hello? This is Shauna.”

“Hey. It’s me.”

“Oh, hey Jackie. What’s up?” Jackie hated when she did that. Asking what’s up made it feel like Jackie had to have a reason for calling. She always called to just talk, but when Shauna asked why she was calling it made her feel like a nuisance or like Shauna just wanted her to get to the point.

“I just wanted to check in. You never called last night.”

“Oh, I’m sorry. I didn’t know I was supposed to.” She literally said that she was going to call. Every word was pissing Jackie off.

“You just said you would, but it’s not a big deal. I just figured I’d ask how your night was.”

“Yeah, it was good. Thanks for asking.” That’s it? Nothing else? Why did the conversation feel like she was pulling teeth?

“Yeah, of course.” Then it was silent. Awkward again. The same awkwardness when Jackie had mentioned her date. She just decided to ask.

Jackie took a deep breath, “Shauna, did you go on a date last night?”

Silence again. She was taking a long time to answer. “Yeah... I did.”

“And that’s why you didn’t call?”

Shauna sighed, “I don’t know, Jax.”

“I mean... I kind of asked you yesterday, too. Why didn’t you just tell me?”

“I don’t know.” Shauna went quiet. That’s it?

“I just don’t get why you wouldn’t just be honest about it. It’s not a big deal, but I don’t get why you’d lie.”

“I didn’t fucking lie, Jackie. And it is a big deal. It’s all a big fucking deal to me. I don’t know what you want me to say.” Shauna snapped, like really snapped at Jackie for the first time in a long time. Maybe even for the first time since they rekindled their... whatever their relationship was. Jackie just stood there, phone in hand, mouth open, unsure of what to say next. Shauna sighed. “I’m sorry, Jax. It’s hard for me to talk about this stuff.”

“Okay. Sorry. We don’t have to talk about it then. I didn’t mean to upset you.” Shauna sighed again, and that pissed Jackie off too. Shauna was the one who got frustrated. Shauna was the one who snapped at her and lied to her and made it weirder than it had to be. “Actually, I have to go. Sorry, like I said I just wanted to check in.” Jackie hung up the phone without saying goodbye and crawled into her bed. Getting yelled at by Shauna was not what she was expecting when she made the call. She was done with the day, potentially the week, and just wanted to curl up and lay alone in the dark. This whole thing was exhausting enough to knock her out for the night.

Chapter 35

They didn't talk for the next few days. It was probably the first time they had gone more than a day without talking all semester. It sucked. Jackie called Charlie and they made plans to meet up at the bar on Tuesday, which she was excited about. Everything just always felt dimmer when she and Shauna weren't talking, something she had to learn the hard way the last two years or so. She spent the rest of the week going to work and classes, trying to distract herself from all things Shauna before eventually ending up at Triangle on Saturday. She didn't drink, but just hung out at the bar with Re all night before walking back home around 1:30. She got up to her apartment, took a shower to fight her urge to call Shauna and finally ended up in her bedroom. She looked at the phone, wondering if it would hurt to call and she noticed that she had a voicemail. She clicked the button on the machine and it started playing out. It was Shauna who was very obviously wasted, slurring her words and sounding pretty upset.

"Jackie, baby. I'm so sorry. I'm so so so sorry for everything. I can't believe I fucking yelled at you." Shauna sighed and continued, 'I feel like I just keep hurting you.' Oh she was SO drunk. Jackie smiled to herself, it was cute to hear her like this. "I know you're going on dates... And I'm going on dates." Dates plural? How many had she been on? She sounded genuinely sad about it before whispering into the phone, "Don't you hate this? I think I hate this." Shauna started laughing uncontrollably into the phone, but Jackie couldn't get past the multiple dates Shauna was talking about. What the fuck? Why wouldn't she mention that? "God I'm so stupid for this. I probably shouldn't be calling, I know that. I just miss you so fucking much. Adam just... he's not you." Adam? Her date, or dates plural, were with a guy? Jackie was even more angry now. Shauna sighed, "You have no idea, baby..." The use of the word sent a shiver down Jackie's spine, her low voice, her drunken slur of speech. It was sexy. It didn't matter how hurt or angry Jackie was, Shauna would always have this effect over her. Shauna giggled into the phone, "Just the thought of you even looking at somebody new... God Jackie it kills me." Shauna took a deep breath, it was slow and sexy. "I keep this picture of you by my bed..." Jackie sighed and looked at the picture of Shauna on her desk, "You look so sexy in it." Jackie had to take a deep breath. It was insane how easy it was for Shauna to turn her on. It was also really unfair for Shauna to be doing it to her. They had rules for a reason. Obviously Jackie didn't like this, obviously she was fucking upset, but here they were.

Shauna paused, took a breath in and continued in almost a sigh, "I wish you were here right now... but I guess you probably wish you weren't. We wouldn't be just friends if I had you in my bedroom." Jackie actually gasped. Shauna laughed again. It was clear she was not going to remember any of this tomorrow. 'Do you know how hard I've tried to keep myself from saying anything bad? All I want to do is say bad things to you, baby.' Jackie was wet. All it took was like three sentences and Jackie was ready to throw away the whole idea of their friendship. "Adam is just... I don't think I like it as much with him." She doesn't like WHAT as much? Did she fuck him? What the fuck. Jackie was so unbelievably jealous that she almost just deleted the message before letting it finish. She felt how badly it hurt deep in her chest, and even though she had been entertaining the idea of fucking that girl the other

night in the bathroom, she hadn't. She couldn't do it. Why was Shauna always fucking capable of it? "I love you, Jax. I miss you. I'm sorry I ruined us." Shauna was crying, and that was all Jackie needed to completely bail on any feelings of anger. She just wanted to hug her and kiss her, make her feel better. Shauna didn't cry very often, and Jackie felt sick to her stomach listening to it play out.

Jackie heard Nat's voice on the line, "Shipman. You need to be in bed. Come on."

Shauna continued, "No, no. I'm talking to Jackie!" Jackie could hear the excitement in her voice, and it made her smile.

"Jackie?" Nat asked. She sighed. "Shauna, she's not here. I'm hanging up the phone. Go to bed." The line cut out and Jackie was left feeling pretty much every possible emotion. She was unbelievably jealous and hurt, but she knew that she couldn't be. She had asked for this, which she was also starting to regret, but she knew it was the right decision, so inevitably she just felt extremely sad. It was ridiculously painful to know how badly they both wanted each other, but still knowing also that they couldn't be together. She collapsed into her bed, thinking about how she fucked Adam. Jackie found herself obsessing over every detail. Did she like it? She liked it with Jeff. Did she ride him? Who was in control? Did she cum? She thought about it over and over again until she ended up in tears.

The next morning, she woke up and replayed the voicemail, getting herself pissed off all over again. She decided to go for a run by herself, without being forced by Tai for the first time since she stopped playing soccer. It was terrible, actually. She gave up after a mile and turned around and walked the rest of the way back. She was wildly out of shape. Apparently ramen, vodka, and no exercise wasn't exactly a healthy lifestyle. She had hoped the run would help clear her mind like Tai insisted it did, but it did nothing. All it did was give her nothing to do except think. Think about Shauna fucking that Adam guy, kissing him, waking up next to him in bed. Jackie thought about him getting to see her naked. She thought about how he got to see how beautiful she looked when she was coming undone. Yeah, the run didn't help. When she got back to her apartment, she took a shower and made herself lunch. She did everything she could to keep herself away from her phone, that is until it started to ring. It had to have been Shauna. She was probably just waking up and Nat had told her about the call. Fuck. Part of her wanted to just ignore it, but she knew she couldn't.

"Hey, it's Jackie." All it took was Shauna's breathing for Jackie to know it was her.

"Hey, Jax."

"Oh, Shauna. Hi." Jackie had no idea how to approach this conversation. She still had so many mixed emotions about the call and couldn't tell if she wanted to yell at her, cry, fuck her, or just hold her. It was extremely confusing.

"Hey..." Shauna laughed awkwardly.

"Did you have fun last night?" Jackie intended for it to be light hearted, but it didn't really come off that way. Shauna ignored it though, which Jackie was only kind of thankful for.

"I had a little bit too much to drink."

Jackie laughed, "Yeah, I could tell. How much do you remember?"

“Um, well... I kind of remember leaving the bar.” Jackie laughed, “Nat told me I called you last night...”

“You don’t remember any of it?” Jackie asked.

“No, not any of it.”

“I didn’t really think you were gonna.” Jackie smiled into the phone and Shauna groaned.

“Oh, god. What did I say?” Jackie paused and thought about how she wanted to play this. On one hand, yelling at Shauna for fucking some guy would probably make her feel better, but then she’d have to tell her everything else and that would be breaking the rules. She could have fun with this. Shauna deserved it.

“Hmm... what did you say?”

“Oh, come on Jax. Tell me!” Jackie laughed.

“I don’t know... maybe I’ll have to just listen to the four minute voicemail again to jog my memory. Might have to call you back.”

“Was it bad?”

Jackie paused. Was it bad? Yeah, it kind of made Jackie feel like shit, but it was honest at least. “It was... honest.”

“Jackie, you’re killing me here.”

“It’s fine, Shipman. Really.”

Shauna took a deep breath, “I’m sorry. I don’t know what I said, but I’m sorry if I crossed a line or if I said something to hurt you.”

Jackie couldn’t bring herself to tell her it was okay. She decided to change the subject instead. “So, what’d you do last night?”

Shauna sighed and played along. “Drank. A lot. Nat had the night off, Lottie felt like partying and I was just having too much fun, I guess.” Having too much fun. Jackie wondered if Adam was there. Some fucking boyfriend he was leaving her alone when she was that drunk. Jackie had known Charlie for a night and the girl had walked her all the way to her bedroom and pumped her full of water. Jackie would’ve done better if it were her, not that that was relevant.

“That’s what college is for. It’s good that you loosened up a bit, had some fun.”

“Yeah...” Shauna sighed again, “You’re really not gonna tell me?” Jackie laughed.

“How about this... you tell me what you think you said and I’ll tell you yes or no?”

“That feels like a trap...” Jackie smiled.

“It’s the best offer I’ve got.”

“Okay, okay... did I at least apologize for yelling at you the other day?”

“Yes, you did. It was probably a little overdue though, don’t you think?”

“Yeah... it was. I’m sorry. For not calling and for yelling and getting frustrated. I’m getting used to stuff you know? It’s hard... to hear about you on dates.”

“Okay, apology accepted. I might’ve been kind of a bitch. I just want us to be able to talk.”

“Yeah... me too.” Shauna went quiet for a minute, “Can I try?”

Jackie nodded her head before remembering that Shauna couldn’t see her, “Yeah, ask me whatever.”

“Are you gonna go out with her again?”

“I don’t think so. She was nice but you know, just wasn’t right. Didn’t feel right.”

Shauna took a deep breath. “I’ve gone on a couple dates, too.” Jackie was wondering when she was going to mention him.

“Oh, I heard.” Jackie huffed into the phone.

“Fuck. Jackie, come on. What did I say?” Shauna was practically begging.

“Nope, that voicemail is mine and mine only. If you wanna know you’re gonna have to come listen to it yourself.” Shauna laughed.

“Don’t tempt me.” Jackie rolled her eyes. Shauna was much too occupied with her new boyfriend. She wasn’t going to visit Jackie.

“You like him?” Jackie said it and her heart broke a little bit. It was evil that they were talking about this.

Shauna took her time answering, “I don’t know yet. Maybe. I don’t hate him, I don’t think.”

Jackie felt her eyes fill and then choked down the sob that was threatening to come out, “Good. I’m glad you’re giving it a chance.” Shauna didn’t say anything, and Jackie knew it was because there really wasn’t much to say. “I should probably get going pretty soon.”

“Yeah, for sure. Just one more thing...”

“Yeah?”

“Did I, you know... break any rules, cross any lines?” Jackie laughed.

“Yeah, you definitely broke some rules, crossed some lines.”

“Oh, god. I’m sorry—”

Jackie cut her off, “No. It’s okay. I didn’t... I don’t mind. It’s okay.” Jackie had liked it, endless emotions aside, Jackie knew she had liked it. She hung up the phone before Shauna could answer her with a question that Jackie would have to answer honestly.

Jackie spent the rest of the weekend buried in her homework. Her and Shauna had talked every day, but neither of them really said much. The calls were awkward and never lasted very long. It was kind of awful and both of them just seemed bitter the whole time. Jackie did everything she could to not think about it, but the only thing in her head was Shauna fucking some guy. On Tuesday night, Renee came into her room with cheap takeout. They ate, got

ready and headed over to the bar already drunk. Charlie was already there when they walked in. Jackie greeted her with a hug and thanked her in person for making sure she got home safe. The three of them drank the night away, and Jackie started to get drunk enough to let herself get a little handsy with Charlie. She was hot. Her messy blonde curls fell over her face when she danced and her tight black jeans clung to her body perfectly. Jackie felt the curve of her hips and touched her arms whenever she got the opportunity to. Charlie smiled at her the first few times before returning the gesture. Soon enough, they were both four or five shots deep and Renee was nowhere to be found. Charlie turned around and rubbed her body up against Jackie. She reached behind her and grabbed onto the back of Jackie's neck, letting her kiss her neck as they danced. Jackie pressed her lips against her skin, then her tongue. She tasted like sweat, and Jackie was just glad to be thinking about anything but Shauna. Charlie's slender fingers clutched at her hair and Jackie wrapped her hands around the girl's waist. They were getting carried away. Jackie started to laugh and allowed some distance between them.

Charlie turned back around and wrapped her arms around Jackie's neck, playing with the straps of her dress. "Another drink?"

"A shot?" Charlie nodded and they walked up to the bar and immediately had two glasses set in front of them. They downed the shots without hesitation, and went back out to the dance floor. All night, they tested their limits. They'd let their mouths get close and then pull away, they'd let their hands wander and then they'd drop them. Jackie had fun letting the tension build. It was sexy. She liked feeling hands on her body, she liked feeling skin under her fingers. With Charlie it didn't feel serious. It didn't feel like there were any expectations. They were both in positions where a relationship felt crazy, but they definitely weren't ever going to just be friends. Around 2 am Renee found them and they decided to head out before close for the first time in a long time. The three of them were all as drunk as they ever had been and stumbled together laughing all the way home.

They made it through the doorway and it was clear that Charlie wasn't leaving for the night. She was way too drunk and it was obvious. Renee went straight to bed, as she did every time they went out and Charlie stayed with Jackie in the kitchen. Jackie grabbed two glasses and filled them with water while Charlie stood just far enough away to not be touching behind her.

"So... maybe I should crash on the couch?"

"Well you're definitely not going to try to walk home alone." Jackie laughed and turned around, expecting Charlie to make space for her but she didn't. Maybe she shouldn't crash on the couch. They were standing essentially nose to nose and Charlie took the glasses out of her hands. She placed them on the counter behind Jackie and pressed into her. Her hands found Jackie's hips and Jackie felt her breath on her neck.

"This... would be a bad idea, right?" Charlie asked as she tucked her fingers under Jackie's shirt.

"Maybe it doesn't have to be." Jackie looked into her piercing blue eyes and they had a silent conversation. It didn't have to be. They were both a mess, they both needed some kind of release. Shauna was fucking Adam... why couldn't Jackie sleep with this beautiful girl standing in front of her who looked like she'd do anything for it.

“Maybe it doesn’t...” Charlie leaned in and kissed her. Her lips were soft and they tasted like vodka. Jackie pushed her tongue into the girl’s mouth and allowed herself to be pushed against the counter behind her. Charlie’s hands worked their way up Jackie’s dress and clawed at her skin. Jackie moaned at the feeling of it. Charlie moved her lips to her neck, sucking gently at her skin. Jackie wrapped her fingers in her hair and tilted her head to give the girl space to do whatever she wanted. That’s what Jackie needed. She needed this girl to do whatever she wanted with her, she needed to get lost in it and just experience it for what it is, not what it isn’t. It was okay to let herself feel good without needing it to be Shauna. Jackie pushed Charlie back into the sink and the sound of it was definitely enough to wake Renee.

“Oh, fuck. Bedroom?” Charlie asked. Jackie nodded, refusing to break up the makeout session. It felt too good to stop for even the ten steps it would take to end up in the bedroom. Jackie pushed Charlie onto the bed, pulling at her top before Charlie took it off completely. Jackie attacked her newly exposed skin, licking and kissing all of it. She sucked on the girl’s nipples, salivating at the moans it resulted in. She kissed down her stomach and unbuttoned the girl’s jeans. As Charlie sat up to take them all the way off, Jackie put her hair up with the hair tie on her wrist. The second they were off Jackie ran her hands up Charlie’s thighs, she grabbed the girl’s hips and looked into her eyes. Charlie was looking at her like she was fucking desperate. Jackie’s eyes rolled back in her head, the thought of being needed that badly making her wet. She wanted to make her feel good. That was the only thing she wanted right now. Jackie leaned down and kissed her upper thighs, licked the bottom of her stomach and made eye contact as she wrapped her lips around the girl’s clit. She sucked lightly and Charlie collapsed backwards into the pillows. ‘Fuck, Jack.’ Jackie smiled and licked into her pussy, tasting her on her tongue, lightly flicking her tongue in and out of her opening. She tasted so fucking good. Jackie hadn’t realized how badly she had needed to fuck. It wasn’t Shauna, and that was very clear, but it was good. It felt good. Charlie reached down and held her head in place, but Jackie wasn’t just going to do whatever she wanted. She moved her tongue back up to her clit, moving in circles until Charlie started to moan and grind her hips into Jackie’s face. Jackie moved her hand between the girl’s legs and let her grind herself into her fingers. “Oh, god. Please... please!” The breathy pleading tone of voice was so hot, Jackie couldn’t resist it. She pushed one finger in and slowly started to fuck her with it, Charlie had one hand wrapped in her ponytail and the other clutched onto Jackie’s bicep, making sure she doesn’t pull out. Jackie moaned at the sounds she was making and added another finger. She started pumping in and out at a steady pace until it felt like Charlie was going to explode, then all it took was Jackie curling her fingers for her to cum hard and loud. Jackie had planned on fucking her through it but Charlie climbed up to her knees, pulling Jackie into a deep kiss.

“You have way too many clothes on.” Jackie laughed.

“A little help, then?” Jackie stood up and Charlie unzipped her dress slowly... teasing her with her teeth and her tongue against her shoulder. Jackie was soaked. The zipper was undone, and Charlie’s fingers pulled the dress off of her shoulders, letting it drop to the floor as they worked around her body, her tits, stomach, thighs. Jackie closed her eyes and just took in how good it felt. Charlie put pressure on Jackie’s stomach and turned her around, wrapping her lips around her nipples, sending electric shocks through her body. Jackie tilted her head back and moaned. She felt Charlie’s desperate fingers pulling at her thong and Jackie kicked it off for her. Charlie pushed two fingers into Jackie without warning and Jackie moaned at how full she felt. She locked eyes with Charlie.

“Does that feel good, baby?” Jackie nodded frantically and Charlie leaned up to suck on her neck as she finger fucked her. Jackie could feel her wetness nearly spilling out of her. She had needed this. She had really, really needed this. Charlie bit her neck hard enough for Jackie to gasp at the feeling. She was surprised at how much she liked it. Charlie wrapped her free hand around Jackie’s and she pulled her arm up to her mouth. Charlie locked her piercing blue eyes on Jackie’s and slipped the fingers Jackie had fucked her with into her mouth. She made a show of licking and sucking them completely clean, never breaking eye contact. Jackie nearly screamed at the sight of it.

“Oh, that’s so good. Fuck that’s good.” Jackie moaned out. She felt her legs start to shake and her orgasm bubbling in her stomach. She came hard and Charlie leaned down. Jackie wasn’t paying much attention, instead too focused on coming down from her high when she felt Charlie’s tongue moving slowly and deeply through her folds. Jackie felt her core muscles tighten in surprise and she sat up and saw Charlie planted between her legs. She had her arms wrapped around Jackie’s legs and held her down as she fucked her with her tongue. “Jesus, fuck Charlie.” Jackie slammed herself back into the bed and reached down to hold Charlie’s head in place when the phone started to ring. It was Shauna, it had to be Shauna. Charlie pulled away and she watched Jackie look at the phone.

“No, no. Don’t stop. Ignore it.” Jackie pleaded, Charlie took her direction and dove back in. The phone continued to ring until all of a sudden it was Shauna’s voice. She was leaving a voicemail.

“Hey, Jax. It’s me,” Jackie took about a millisecond to wonder if maybe she should stop, but Shauna’s voice was never going to be a turn off for her. Shauna continued, ‘I guess I was just calling to say hi.’ Charlie looked back up at her to see what she wanted to do, but at this point Jackie was way too invested in the way Charlie felt inside of her, and she missed the feeling of her tongue. She started to grind her hips into the girl’s face. The voicemail continued and Jackie focused on the sound of her voice, “I figured you’d probably be back from the bar by now but maybe not. Call me later. Bye.” Jackie opened her eyes and saw Charlie’s eyes rolled back in her head, clearly enjoying this new lack of control. Jackie moaned loudly and found a good rhythm. She was making a mess of Charlie’s face, and Jackie honestly loved seeing it covered in her wetness. It was hot. Jackie felt her orgasm building and as soon as her rhythm faltered Charlie picked it back up. Jackie came almost immediately and as soon as it ended, felt her body go limp. Charlie climbed back up on top of her, kissing her stomach and then her lips, and Jackie could taste herself on her face. She moaned softly and then felt Charlie collapse next to her in the bed. Her head was spinning and between the alcohol and the sex and the voicemail it was hard to think about much of anything.

“Yeah... definitely not a bad idea.” Jackie said with an out of breath laugh. Charlie laughed too and rolled over, resting her head on Jackie’s chest. It wasn’t long before both of them were passed out.

Chapter 36

The next morning Jackie woke up to a pounding headache. She almost forgot what had happened last night... what she had done. She looked over at Charlie sleeping naked in her bed and remembered that Shauna had tried to call her. She had used Shauna's voicemail to get off while she fucked her. God that was fucking demented. It was so good though. Fuck. Charlie started to stir next to her and turned over to face her, "Good morning." Jackie smiled softly at her.

"Morning," Charlie looked conflicted about everything too, and she squinted her eyes at Jackie with a little grin on her face.

"So... how are we feeling about last night?" Jackie asked, hoping Charlie would just tell her how she should feel about it.

"Hungover." Charlie smiled, "But I think it's okay. We were drunk, we both needed it I think, right?"

"Yeah, I think so. Are you freaking out about Candace?"

Charlie took a deep breath, "I just... am wondering if she's slept with somebody else too." Jackie nodded.

"Yeah... I get that." All that Jackie had been able to think about for weeks is this fucking Adam guy, and they weren't even dating. She couldn't imagine how much of a disaster she would be if they were.

"How are you... with Shauna and everything?"

Jackie sighed. "I don't know. I think last night was good for me. It definitely felt good for me. I'm just adjusting, you know. It's complicated."

Charlie propped herself up on her elbow to look closer at Jackie. "What happened with you guys?"

"Oh, god. Well... we've been best friends for literally ever, I've been in love with her forever. In high school I was a lot less comfortable. I was homecoming queen three years in a row, dating the hottest guy in my grade. Finally, Shauna and I started hooking up and then I found out she had also been fucking my boyfriend. It fucked me up pretty bad."

"Jesus... and you still talk to her?"

"I didn't for a long time and even now it's definitely weird. I don't know. I need to move on but I'm just so helpless when it comes to her. I just can't stay away from her. I thought being friends would help but I don't know."

"That's crazy actually. I'm so sorry that happened to you." Charlie reached out and grabbed her forearm to comfort her.

"No, no. It's okay. What about you? What happened with Candace?"

“She wouldn’t come out. She wanted to hide me and I couldn’t handle that. It had been 5 years of me waiting for her to tell anybody at all about us and she just couldn’t do it.”

“Oh wow. That would be a lot, yeah.” Jackie thought about her ‘secret’ relationship that apparently Tai, Van, and Lottie all knew about the whole time. Not telling anybody for five years seems so isolating.

“I might be regretting it. I don’t know. If she told any of her friends at all I think I’d go back in a heartbeat. I just can’t be in the closet anymore. That’s why I went to a gay bar. I just needed to be around it.” Jackie nodded and Charlie sat up, holding the blanket over herself.

“Do you want to borrow some clothes?” She nodded and Jackie stood up, walking over to her dresser and pulling out clothes for the both of them. She handed Charlie her pile and they both got dressed.

“I really did have a lot of fun last night. Thank you...” Charlie said, smiling softly, “for everything.” Charlie winked at her and bit her lip. Jackie took a step closer to her and kissed her gently.

“Thank you.” They stood there for a second smiling at each other before Charlie smoothed out Jackie’s hair.

“I gotta get to work. Call me though, okay?” Jackie nodded and walked her out, running into Renee in the kitchen on their way. She laughed and waved goodbye to Charlie. As soon as the door closed she screamed.

“I fucking KNEW IT!”

“Oh, whatever.” Jackie laughed and covered her face.

“Was it good? It sounded like it was good. Not that I was listening...”

Jackie peeked through her fingers and saw Renee staring at her expectantly. “Yeah... it was good.” Renee laughed.

“I wonder how Shauna’s gonna feel about all this.” Renee raised her eyebrows.

“She shouldn’t be any type of way about it. She has been fucking a man.”

Renee choked on her coffee. “She has been WHAT?” Jackie nodded, “And she just told you that?”

“She left a voicemail that she doesn’t remember. She doesn’t know I know.”

“Okay, well this forward step you took makes a lot more sense now.” Jackie pushed her shoulder playfully and rolled her eyes. “So are you gonna tell her?”

“I don’t know... I don’t want it to ruin the whole break.” Renee nodded.

“When are you leaving?”

“Tai and Van said they’d pick me up around 4.”

“Okay,” Re exaggerated a frown before she continued, “You should probably shower first. You smell like liquor and sex.”

Jackie sniffed herself and agreed. She definitely smelled like shit. She spent the rest of the morning showering and packing. She decided not to return Shauna's call. She wanted to let her wonder where she had been. Let her stress out about it like Jackie had. It was only fair. When Van pulled up in front of her apartment, Jackie noticed Lottie was in the backseat too.

"No way! Lot! I didn't know you were coming!" Jackie screamed, opening up the back door and jumping in to hug her.

"We got in early and I wanted to see you! I thought it would be fun. Like a road trip, all four of us!"

"Oh my god, it's so good to see you guys. I've really missed you."

"God, Jax you're so mushy. What happened to you?" Tai asked.

"I think what she meant to say was we missed you too, babe." Van said back. She put the car in drive and started moving toward their hometown.

"So... what's new? What've you been up to?" Lottie asked. Jackie could tell she was nervous. She must know about Adam and was checking in on her. It was sweet, albeit pretty see through.

"I've been... good. I have some tea, actually."

"Oooh, spill!" Van said from the front seat. Tai whipped her head around, waiting for her to continue.

"I slept with somebody last night..."

Tai's jaw hung open and Lottie gasped excitedly. "What?! Who?" Van asked.

"Some girl I met at the bar. We were ridiculously drunk. It wasn't serious or anything... but it was fun." Jackie was beaming. It was so exciting talking about stuff with everybody. She really had missed them.

"Was it good?" Lottie asked.

"It was. It was really really good." Jackie laughed a little embarrassed to be talking about it with one of Shauna's closest friends.

"Does Shauna know?" Tai asked.

"We haven't talked, so you know. She will, eventually."

"I mean, you guys have been good at being just friends for a while, though. It could be okay, right? Like she won't freak out?"

It was time. She had to tell them. "So... Here's the thing though, we haven't been very good about being 'just friends'. We were hooking up all summer."

Tai rolled her eyes and face palmed, while Van laughed and Lottie just sat there looking surprised. "I can't believe she didn't tell Nat." Lottie said. "I'm actually shocked," she started laughing with Van.

"I know. I know. I'm sorry! But we made rules. We're actually trying now. I promise!"

“You have like zero self control, Taylor.” Tai said, finally joining in on the laughter. Jackie laughed too.

“She still shouldn’t be mad about it though, she’s been fucking some guy named Adam, apparently.” Lottie’s eyes got big and she turned to face Jackie.

“You KNOW about that?” Jackie started laughing.

“Yes, but Shauna doesn’t know I know. She doesn’t remember telling me.”

“Jesus this is so much juicer from your side. Shauna doesn’t ever give me shit. My gossip chain is Shauna, who never talks to Natalie, who also never talks.” The girls laughed and the drive flew by. They caught each other up on everything new, which really wasn’t much. Van was trying again with her mom, trying to stay at home all break. Apparently she had stopped drinking, and Van was choosing to believe her. They decided that it could all wait though, and they were going to have a sleepover their first night back together. They got back and immediately went to the diner to get something to eat, and then went to the liquor store to stock up for the night. It didn’t take long for them to start pouring out drinks. By 10 they were all wasted. Nat was spending the night at Shauna’s so that the four of them could have a night all to themselves. It was refreshing. There was no drama, no stress, just Jackie and her friends.

The next morning was Thanksgiving. Jackie had planned on third wheeling with Lottie and Nat until Lottie called upstairs for her, saying she had gotten a phone call. She jogged down the stairs and grabbed it from her.

“Hey, it’s Jackie!”

“Hey, Jax. It’s Shauna.”

“Oh, hey! What’s up?”

“Well, I talked to my mom, and we’d both really love it if you’d come over for Thanksgiving. It won’t be anything crazy, just the two of us but you’ve always been family.” Jackie’s eyes filled with tears. This is why she could never stay upset with Shauna. She was so sweet when she let herself be.

“I’d really like that, yeah. Thank you. Tell your mom I say thank you.”

“Don’t mention it, seriously. My mom said dinner’s at 6, so be there by 7.” Shauna laughed and Jackie did too, thinking back on her years spent at the Shipman house. How everybody always ran late, and dinners always went wrong. It was perfect chaos all the time. Jackie showed up with store bought apple pie at 5, ready to help however she was needed. Ms. Shipman greeted her with a hug and a glass of wine since ‘her kids were old enough now’. Jackie could’ve cried at the statement, but she held it together and accepted the glass from her. They raced around the kitchen together, just like the old days. They joked and drank and cooked together. The turkey was running about an hour behind, just like Shauna predicted and they decided to start with the pie. Ms. Shipman made pumpkin, like she did every year, and it was fantastic. The store bought apple was pretty good too. By the time they finished dinner, they were all a little tipsy.

“Jackie, honey... I am so glad you came by. This is probably my favorite Thanksgiving so far. We’ve both really missed having you around,” Shauna’s mom said with tears in her eyes.

Jackie smiled.

“Thank you so much for the invite. You have no idea how much I’ve missed you, too.” Jackie hugged her again and Ms. Shipman excused herself, saying she needed to go to bed. Jackie looked at Shauna when she was gone, a little concerned about how tired she was.

“She worked the night shift last night, she hasn’t slept yet.” That made the invite even more heartwarming. She could’ve just gone to bed, done an early and lowkey dinner with Shauna, but she didn’t. She stayed up, made a whole turkey and invited Jackie over to eat with them.

“Seriously, thank you for the invite. I’ve missed it over here.” Jackie looked around at the kitchen. It hadn’t changed.

“We couldn’t have had it without you, Jax.” Shauna smiled at her and Jackie smiled back. They stood in silence, waiting for what was coming next.

“It’s still kinda early... want another glass?” Jackie remembered their rules, not being alone together while drunk was definitely one of them. They weren’t drunk yet, but another glass just might do it. Shauna sensed her hesitation and continued, “We’ll stay in the living room. It’s practically in public.” She smiled and Jackie gave in. She held out her glass to be filled and they sat down on the couch together. Shauna put in the copy of *Pretty Woman* that Jackie had bought for her and they sat there talking, not watching the movie at all, just catching up on everything other than their dates. It was fun. Two glasses of wine later it was very clear that Shauna was not in any position to drive her back to Lottie’s. Every movement brought their bodies involuntarily closer to each other. By the time the credits rolled, their thighs were touching. Jackie couldn’t draw her attention off of Shauna’s lips, and it was starting to feel very dangerous even in the ‘practically public’ living room. Shauna sat up to face her as she talked about what it’s like living with Renee.

“Do you ever get drunk and end up in each other’s beds?” Shauna asked, playing it off like a lighthearted question but Jackie knew it was more than that.

“What?” Jackie laughed, “No, of course not.”

“You say that like you’re not all up on each other all the time.” Shauna said with a convincing, but still very fake smile.

“We haven’t been. We aren’t really like that anymore.” Shauna’s smile grew wider and Jackie laughed. “You don’t have to look so excited about it, Shipman. It was never a big deal.” Jackie locked eyes with Shauna and found herself lost in how beautiful they were. She was drunk enough that there was no hope of tearing herself away from this girl.

“You kissing somebody else definitely felt like a big deal.” Shauna took another sip of her wine, breaking the eye contact Jackie had been obsessing over.

“Felt like? Past tense?” Jackie teased. She knew it was wrong to joke about it but she wanted Shauna to tell her that it would still bother her, and words were just flowing out of her mouth before she could stop them.

Shauna rolled her eyes and Jackie took a drink, waiting for her response. It came in nearly a whisper, “You just looking at somebody that isn’t me feels like a big deal.” Jackie was

caught off guard. She didn't expect Shauna to respond so honestly and her possessiveness turned her on. Shauna grinned at her, looking very smug in the reaction she had gotten.

Jackie recovered quickly, "So you said in your voicemail." Shauna's face dropped and Jackie returned the smug look she had just lost.

"That's not fair. I can't believe you're not gonna tell me what I said!"

"I can't believe you drunk called me and not your new boyfriend," Jackie said back, half under her breath.

"He's not my boyfriend, Jackie," Jackie rolled her eyes and finished her drink, grabbing the bottle to refill it. "Come on, what did I say? You really don't want to talk about it?"

"You really want to know?" Shauna nodded eagerly and Jackie took a sip before leaning in. Shauna looked at her confused, "We're in public, Shauna. Can't let your mom hear." Jackie knew Shauna's mom wasn't gonna hear anything, she just wanted to be closer to the girl. This is why they weren't allowed to be alone together when they were drunk. Shauna smiled and leaned in, holding eye contact with Jackie. It was like a game to see who would break it to look at the other girl's lips first.

"Tell me," Shauna whispered.

"You told me that you keep a picture of me by your bed..." Jackie whispered. Shauna's face went bright red and Jackie smiled at the sight of it. 'You told me that all you want to do is say everything you know you shouldn't.' Shauna swallowed and Jackie obsessed over the way her throat looked when she did it. "You told me how sexy I was. You told me that you missed me... you told me that you wished I was there." Shauna's eyes went dark and she lost their game. Her eyes darted down to Jackie's lips and Jackie felt butterflies in her chest as Shauna licked her own. "You told me that if I was in your bedroom we wouldn't be just friends anymore." Shauna looked back up at her eyes and Jackie could tell she was close to risking everything. Jackie's breath got caught in her throat and she really really wanted to close the gap and just say fuck it and fuck her right there on the couch, but she also wanted to win. "You told me... that you didn't like it as much with him." Jackie pulled away, not giving Shauna the opportunity to break the tension she had so carefully crafted, but she leaned right back in.

"I don't." Their faces were inches apart, and Jackie was flustered now. She didn't expect Shauna to double down. She expected her to be embarrassed or apologetic or trying to reestablish boundaries or something. Not this. This was unexpected and it was... hot. Shauna grabbed the back of the couch, cornering Jackie in with her arm. Jackie's heart was beating way too fast and Shauna was leaning over her, with her cleavage on full display. There were so many things to not look at that Jackie forgot about her eyes. She tried to regroup.

"You're drunk."

"And?" Shauna refused to break eye contact.

"Maybe I should call Van so she can drive me home."

Shauna's eyes darted down to Jackie's lips, "Maybe we should go upstairs." Jackie's gaze fell to Shauna's tits and she lost all focus on the real world. She remembered the way they felt in her mouth, how soft the skin was and the way Shauna moaned when she kissed them. In

the same second though, she thought about Adam touching them, Adam kissing them. She broke from her trance. She reached out and put her hand on Shauna's thigh.

"I think I'm going to call Van." Shauna looked disappointed but she seemed to come back to the real world and sober up a little bit. She moved her arm and leaned back.

"Okay. I suppose we are already pushing the rules." Jackie looked at her and reconsidered one more time before getting up and dialing the phone. Van promised to be there in 10. Jackie made her way back into the living room and sat down next to Shauna.

"I'm sorry," Shauna said.

"Why? I started it."

"Yeah but I pushed it." They sat in silence for a minute. "We were friends for most of our lives... and now we can't spend a night alone together without pushing it." Shauna seemed stressed about it.

"I'm not sure we were ever just friends." Shauna looked up at her and Jackie smiled.

"Do you think we can be?"

"I think we're trying." Shauna nodded but she seemed upset. This was harder than either of them expected it to be. She stood up and started picking up the wine and packing up the food. Jackie followed her to the kitchen and finished up the dishes. By the time they were done Van was parked outside.

"I love you, Shauna. We'll figure this out, okay?" Shauna nodded and Jackie pulled her into a hug before walking out the door and into the car.

Chapter 37

The next morning Jackie woke up alone. She thought about how she had turned Shauna away, and how much she was regretting the choice. She really fucking missed her. She got up and called Van, who agreed to spend the afternoon at Lottie's watching movies and catching up. Lottie and Nat had disappeared for the date on some wilderness retreat date Lottie had planned. Nat didn't seem that into it, but really anything Lottie asked for Nat was willing to at least try. She was whipped.

"So... how was Thanksgiving with the Shipmans?"

"Hmm well... I didn't break any rules."

"Is that a bad thing?"

"Feels like a bad thing." Van nodded.

"You guys are a fucking trainwreck." Jackie laughed and threw popcorn at her.

"We are doing our very best. Leave us alone. How was Thanksgiving with the Palmers?"

"Well... it lasted about 15 minutes before my mom grabbed a beer." Jackie turned to look at Van.

"I'm so sorry. You went back last night? You know you could've just stayed here." Van waved her off.

"I wanted to make sure she didn't die. I left when she picked up the beer and just smoked in the woods all night. When I got back she was passed out on the couch in a puddle of her own vomit."

"Jesus, Van." Jackie had no idea what to say. Van had been there every second Jackie had needed her and here Jackie was incapable of saying anything at all. "What are you gonna do?"

Van sighed and looked up at the ceiling trying not to cry. "I don't know. I feel like I'm enabling her by picking up the trailer and cleaning up dinner. Even talking to her makes me feel like I'm somehow supporting her behavior." She sighed, "I just... I feel like she's taking advantage. She just lies right to my face. She never stopped drinking, she just knew that's the only way I'd be around."

Jackie wrapped her arm around Van's shoulders. "So you're gonna cut her off?"

Van turned to look at Jackie and she had tears welled up in her eyes. "I think I have to, yeah." Jackie held her tighter while they sat in silence, "I just... she's my mom, you know?" Van broke down.

"I know honey, I know." Jackie let her cry on her shoulder. "You need to take care of yourself, love. All this guilt you're holding onto isn't healthy. Maybe a break from it all

would be good. Why don't you stay here for the rest of the break? We can hang out. You and me. It'll be fun!" Van looked up at Jackie and smiled.

"I think that's a good idea, yeah." They made plans to go out to the bar later that night. Tai offered to drive so that she could relax and try to have fun. They all got ready and did their makeup together at Lottie's, and Jackie and Shauna made an effort to be as normal as possible. A plan that went pretty well until the alcohol started flowing. As soon as Jackie felt even a little bit affected by it, she made sure to be a room away from Shauna if at all possible. Shauna seemed like she was doing the same thing. It was going well for them until they all had to cram into the car. Tai drove, Van was in the passenger seat and Lottie, Nat, Shauna and Jackie were all piled up in the backseat. Nat and Shauna were on the ends, and Jackie was squished between Lottie and Shauna's ridiculously muscular thighs. Jackie was trying not to stare, but Shauna had a pair of very short jean shorts on and a black tank top. Her ass hung out of her shorts, the definition of her thighs was in plain sight and her tits were practically falling out of her shirt. She was fucking stunning, and part of Jackie wondered if she did it on purpose. Jackie spent the whole car ride trying to figure out if she was or was not trying to look at Shauna's tits, and Shauna it looked like, was trying to figure out whether or not she wanted Jackie looking.

When they got to the bar, Jackie, Van and Tai took to the dance floor and Shauna Lottie and Nat found seats at the bar. Every once in a while the groups would collide or swap out a few people, but for the most part Shauna stayed in one half and Jackie stayed in the other. Jackie spent her time dancing with Van, running Tai back and forth from the dance floor to the bar every time they needed drinks. Van was enjoying herself and it was good to see her letting loose a bit. Eventually, Van got so drunk all she wanted to do was dance with Tai, which Jackie could respect because all she wanted to do was dance with Shauna. Jackie found a girl to dance with and even though she wasn't feeling it, she threw herself at it. She wanted to have fun. Dancing with girls was fun. It's always been fun, but now it wasn't and all that did was piss Jackie off. She marched up to the bar and found Shauna, Nat and Lottie. "Shots, anyone?" Lottie and Nat looked at each other and laughed. They were definitely high on something. Jackie looked at Shauna.

"Yeah, I'm down." She seemed nervous. The energy between them was electric. It was like they were both trying to find a good place for their eyes to land. Jackie's ended up on her tits, of course.

Jackie snapped out of it, smiled at her and turned to the bartender, "6 shots of vodka, please." Shauna's eyes went big and Jackie corrected, "5 shots of vodka." The bartender nodded and Shauna laughed as he poured them.

"You're gonna take 3 shots?" Jackie's eyes fell on Shauna's lips and she felt like she was going to either attack them or start crying.

"Yes. I am. And you're taking two with me." Jackie stated very simply.

"Yes ma'am." Shauna said it so innocently and it was unfair how much of an effect it had on Jackie. Jackie reached for the first shot glass and raised it with Shauna. They knocked it back once, then twice, and then Jackie finished her last one. She looked up at Shauna who was looking at her with concern, but also smiling at her with those dark eyes like she had very different worries on her mind than Jackie's alcohol consumption. Jackie held eye contact,

grabbed her beer off the bartop and chased her shots with it. Without another word, Jackie went back to the dance floor.

As she made her way through the crowd, she heard Nat turn to Shauna, “Damn. What the fuck was that about?” She didn’t stick around to hear what Shauna said back, but instead found Tai and Van making out in the same spot she had left them. Another girl came up and started dancing behind her. Jackie leaned into it and tried to imagine it was Shauna. She pictured Shauna’s hands on her hips and her stomach, Shauna’s chest pressed against her back. She really did try, but it wasn’t enough. She was miserable. She looked up and saw that Tai and Van had separated and were dancing wildly to the music. Jackie parted ways from notShauna and tried to enjoy the rest of the night as her best friend’s third wheel. After about an hour she had really started to feel the shots she took and found her way to the bathroom. She sat down in one of the stalls and held her head in her hands. She wanted so badly to just give in, but she knew that even if the goal was to eventually mend things with Shuana, continuing their pattern of bad decisions with no regard for their repercussions wasn’t going to help get them there. It wouldn’t get them anywhere. She stood up and walked to the sink, looking at herself in the mirror. She was drunk. She was very, very drunk. All of the sudden, the bathroom door opened and Shauna was standing in the entryway. She looked up at Jackie in the mirror and looked like a deer in the headlights. She just stared, and Jackie just stared back, eyes locked on each other. Jackie felt her hair standing on end and she wondered if they were ever going to speak or move again.

“I’m sorry...” Jackie shook her head, Shauna didn’t need to apologize for being in the bathroom. That was ridiculous. ‘You look... “Shauna’s eyes moved down, taking in Jackie’s body. She had a dark blue dress on. It was tight and it was short. Shauna looked like she was trying to memorize every inch of her body.” You look stunning, Jackie. You really do.’ Jackie felt like she was going to cry. She looked at Shauna in the mirror and was scared that if she moved to thank her or say or do anything at all the tears would come crashing down. Shauna put her head down, breaking their eye contact and continued, “I’ll come back in a minute. You know... the rules or whatever.” Jackie nodded and watched Shauna turn and walk out of the bathroom. She felt every muscle in her body relax, and she felt the weight of them all too. Jackie took a deep breath, splashed her face with water and walked out of the bathroom. She thought about heading back to the dance floor or maybe to the bartop, but it all seemed so suffocating. She hated these fucking rules. She hated all of it. Why couldn’t she just be there already? Why did it have to be so hard to try to heal from all of this?

Jackie walked out of the front door of the bar and sat down on the curb. She felt the cold air on her shoulders and she took a few deep breaths to calm herself down. Lottie sat down next to her. “Hey, baby. You okay?”

“I’m overwhelmed, I think.” Lottie nodded. Jackie stared across the street, fixated on their reflection in the windows. She leaned over and rested her head on Lottie’s shoulder, who leaned into it.

“I’m sorry, Jax. I feel like some of this is my fault.”

“What do you mean?”

“If I hadn’t gotten with Nat, you could’ve cut her off a long time ago.”

Jackie chuckled at the thought of that ever being a possibility, “I never could’ve cut her off, Lot.” They sat in silence for a minute before Jackie continued, “Do you think I’m handling this well at all?”

“What do you think?” Lottie asked.

“I think I’m a mess. I try so hard not to care or to care about only the right things... I’m just fucking incapable.”

“I don’t think you’re a mess. I think this big of an adjustment takes time. You’re trying. That’s what’s important, don’t you think?”

“I think this big of an adjustment means the girl I have spent my whole life loving is sleeping with someone else and I’m just doing anything I can to piece her together from all the random people I meet in a bar.”

“You are also sleeping with someone else, and you started making out with Renee over a year ago.” Lottie pointed out, apparently no longer trying to be her usual ‘I’m not going to give you the answers... they’re already within you’ vibe, but instead just telling Jackie she’s being an idiot.

“I started making out with Renee because she looked exactly like Shauna, and Charlie... is probably just a means to an end, as awful as it sounds.”

“Maybe just don’t look at her that way, then. These could be good experiences for you if you don’t define them by what they mean compared to Shauna. You guys will figure it out. You love each other, regardless of everything else.” The sound of Van’s voice sat them both up.

“Jackie! Lot! We were looking everywhere for you!”

“No, Nat told us you were out here. We knew exactly where you were,” Tai said with a smile.

“Ah, semantics.” Van waved her off and wrapped her arms around a now standing Lottie and Jackie. They walked together back to the car and climbed in. Jackie sat pressed against Shauna again, who was apparently also drunk because her head was rested against Jackie’s shoulder, and the smell of her lavender shampoo filled Jackie’s nose. She took a deep breath and let herself enjoy it. She rested her cheek on Shauna’s forehead and took in the feeling of her skin. When they got back to Lottie’s house, Jackie crashed on the couch almost immediately.

“Hey, Jax. You gotta go up the stairs to go to bed,” Tai said.

“No, no. You guys take it. I’m good down here.”

Tai looked at her and then at Shauna, seeming very unsure. “You can sleep in your bed, Jackie, it’s okay. We were planning on crashing down here.”

Jackie shook her head. “Seriously, go. I’m good.” Tai smiled and thanked her before hauling Van up the stairs. Shauna appeared from the bathroom just as everybody else had left.

“Oh, fuck. Spend all night trying to respect the rules and this is what it turns into.” She started laughing, clearly drunk but also... a little high?

“Did you smoke?” Jackie asked?

“Yes. Definitely did.” Shauna responded.

“You weren’t drunk enough without it?” Jackie asked. If she was this fucked up, how must Shauna feel if she was high too?

“Baby, the only drinks I had were those two shots and a beer.” The baby was cruel, and Shauna didn’t even pick up on it.

“Oh, I didn’t realize...” Jackie said. She was so tired she was falling asleep mid conversation.

“I’m not that far from sober, Jax.” Jackie nodded and Shauna laughed softly. “What do you need?”

“Shoes, please.” Jackie said. Shauna knelt down at the end of the couch and unstrapped her heels. She gently took one shoe off, then the other. She grabbed Jackie’s feet and lightly massaged them, rubbing all the spots that had caused way too much pressure all night. Jackie fell asleep almost immediately. The next morning she woke up covered in a blanket and Shauna was gone.

Chapter 38

When Jackie got back to campus, she immediately called Charlie.

“Hey, do you have any plans tonight?”

“Jackie? Hey. No, I don’t.”

“Meet me at the bar?”

“Yeah, for sure. I’ll be there at 10.”

Jackie knew that it was about Shauna. It was about how much she had wanted her all break and how little she had gotten, but even so she was still excited to see Charlie. Renee was already working, and Jackie took the opportunity to call Shauna. She knew she wouldn’t be back yet, but she thought she could at least leave a voicemail. The phone rang until inevitably no one answered.

“Hey, Shauna. I know you’re not back yet but I’m about to leave for the bar and I wanted to say that it was really good to see you. Like... really good to see you. I didn’t realize how much I had missed you. Thank you for taking care of me last night. I’m sorry I was a bit of a mess. I um, I think we’re doing the right thing, you know? It’s awful, we both know it’s awful. I just can’t imagine my life without you in it, and I feel like this is the safest option. I guess, I’m just trying to say thank you. For everything. Alright, I gotta go. Love you.” Hopefully that wasn’t too much. It was true, and it was how she felt, so she hoped that Shauna felt okay about it when she heard it. She got dressed in a black leather skirt and a white tank top and practically ran to the bar.

Renee saw her before she was even through the door and had three shots poured out for her, Jackie, and Charlie. “My girl is home! Yes, thank god. It has been so unbelievably boring without you.”

Jackie hugged her over the bar top and greeted Charlie with a hug too. “I’m home, I’m home!” The three of them held up the shot glasses and downed it without a second of hesitation. Re kept the drinks flowing and Charlie and Jackie turned to each other to catch up.

“So... how was your first holiday without Candace?”

“It was lame. It was pretty anticlimactic. Boring, I’d even say.” Jackie laughed. “How was your orphan dinner? Isn’t that what you called it?”

“Well... I actually spent it with Shauna and her mom.”

“Oh?”

“Yeah, it was okay. The dinner was great, actually. The rest of the break... so-so.” Charlie nodded and they ordered another shot. They took it together and Jackie continued, “You haven’t spoken to her at all?”

“Not once.” Charlie looked down at her drink. “I just can’t bring myself to call. What would we talk about? Unless something changes, the problem is still the problem. I can’t overlook it. The ball is in her court.” Charlie shrugged and Jackie yelled at Re across the bar for two more shots. They took them and headed out to the dance floor. It took less than a song for Jackie to have her lips locked on Charlie’s.

“I missed you.” Jackie whispered.

“You missed something.” Charlie laughed and leaned back in to kiss her again. Jackie laughed too.

“Maybe I did...”

“Maybe I did too...” Charlie held eye contact with Jackie while they figured out what was going to happen next. Jackie was tired of that though, she didn’t want to figure anything out... she didn’t want to think. She wanted to feel, so she grabbed Charlie by the lower back and held her close as they leaned back into each other. Jackie pushed her tongue in the other girl’s mouth and felt her hands roaming her body. Charlie’s fingers wrapped around the fabric of her skirt on the side of her thigh and started pushing it up to expose her skin. Jackie moaned at the way the touch felt.

“Do you wanna...” Jackie asked the question without asking it. Charlie nodded and they practically raced to the bathroom. Charlie locked the door behind them and Jackie lifted her up onto the sink. She grabbed her hips and felt Charlie’s legs wrapping around her ass. Her hands pushed at her tank top, pulling it up to expose Jackie’s bra, which was quickly undone. Charlie nipped at Jackie’s neck and all of her newly exposed skin. Jackie moaned and pulled away, clawing at Charlie’s jeans and pushing them down her thighs. She kissed Charlie hard and rough, with all of the intensity she had been wanting to use on Shauna. Charlie bit her lip and grabbed her hand, guiding her down to her underwear. She pulled it to the side and bit her lip, those bright blue eyes staring into Jackie’s.

“Please,” Charlie begged. Jackie moaned and pushed two fingers inside. She slowly started pushing them in and out and Charlie’s nails dug into her back. She started to pick up the pace, and Charlie moaned loudly into her shoulder, biting down hard to stifle the sound. Jackie loved the way it made her feel... to be bitten into and clawed at like Charlie needed her to survive. It was sexy. Jackie sucked hard on the girl’s neck, knowing she was leaving bruises but deciding not to care. She curled her fingers upward and started to thrust harder and deeper. Jackie pulled away to look at Charlie and saw her desperate for anything Jackie would give her. She held eye contact as she dropped to her knees, not slowing down her fingers and adding her tongue and her lips to the girl’s clit. She watched as Charlie’s eyes got big and then rolled back in her head. She screamed and immediately covered her mouth with one of her hands, the other found itself tangled in Jackie’s hair. She pushed her thighs together as she came, holding Jackie securely in place as her orgasm rolled through her. Almost immediately afterward Jackie found herself pushed up against the door. Charlie pushed her skirt over her hips and squeezed her bare ass as she pushed her tongue into Jackie’s mouth. Her hands ran over what felt like every inch of Jackie’s body, and she was obsessed with the feeling of it. Charlie traced every curve and every inch of skin with her tongue, teasing Jackie’s nipples and her neck. She bit and sucked her way down to Jackie’s pussy and without hesitating, she just dove in. She pushed her tongue into her cunt and moaned at the taste of her before moving up and down her slit. She wrapped her lips around Jackie’s clit and sucked gently.

Charlie grabbed onto Jackie's thigh and pulled her over her right shoulder, getting a better angle for her to push her way all the way in. Jackie moaned and banged her head against the door, going crazy with how much pent up emotion she had been repressing. She thought about the tension she had created on Thanksgiving and how close their faces had been. She thought about the way Shauna looked at her and the way her tits looked when they went out. Jackie reached down and squeezed her own tit as Charlie ate her out. She started to suck on her opening while her nose rubbed against her clit. Jackie felt the girl's tongue working in and out of her, drinking every drop of wetness Jackie could produce. It felt so unbelievably good that she moaned and cried out.

"Oh, fuck. Right there. Yes, please don't stop." Jackie was losing her ability to speak and just grunted in shallow breaths until she felt her orgasm tear through her. Charlie didn't stop what she was doing and helped her roll from one right into the next. She kept making her cum until Jackie's legs completely gave out from underneath her and Charlie had to pin her to the door to keep her upright. She opened her eyes and saw Charlie beaming at her, lipstick had found its way onto her cheek and her face was soaked.

"Holy shit Char. That was... insane." Jackie half laughed as she regained control of her legs.

"Sorry, I might have gotten a little carried away there."

"No, no need. I didn't realize you... Holy shit." Jackie was still catching her breath.

"You're not the only one with pent up shit, Jack." She had this smug little smile on her face that made Jackie want to lean back in. She kissed her, softer this time. She sucked on her lip and pulled her in, tasting herself on her tongue.

"Anytime you're feeling... pent up, you just let me know," Jackie joked. Charlie smiled.

"Ditto, baby." They silently cleaned themselves up. The bite mark on Jackie's shoulder was VERY visible, and when she shot Charlie a dirty look she got that same smug smile back in return. "It was good! What do you want from me?" Jackie rolled her eyes and washed her hands and her face. It was now going to be a makeup free night, except for whatever Charlie had left underneath her skirt. Once they looked presentable again, they both made their way back to the bar. Renee took one look at Jackie and her jaw dropped as her eyes moved to her shoulder.

"Jesus, Jack. What the fuck have you been up to?"

"Oh you know... nothing." Jackie said, playing dumb. "Could I get a couple drinks?" Renee nodded and handed them over. Jackie and Charlie spent the rest of the night dancing, but honestly neither of them had much energy left. Charlie headed to bed around midnight and Jackie wasn't far behind. The second she got home she practically ran to the phone. She had a missed call from Shauna about 5 minutes ago. She spent the next 30 minutes downing shot after shot of her own personal tito's stash, trying to figure out how this could be okay. Fucking Charlie the way she did and then immediately going home to call Shauna? It felt wrong. It felt very very wrong. When she had enough liquid courage in her, she dialed the phone.

"Jackie?" Shauna asked. Jackie loved when she did that... answered the phone like it couldn't possibly be anybody else. She smiled.

“Hmm. I like it when you know it’s me.” Shauna laughed into the phone.

“I like when I know it’s you too.” Jackie laughed.

“You better.”

“You’re drunk.” Shauna stated, amused.

“As fuck, yeah.” Shauna laughed.

“Are you okay? You’ve been pretty drunk a lot lately…”

“Oh, just when I need to be,” Jackie joked, trying to play it off. This isn’t why she wanted to call.

“Is it just a coincidence that it happens specifically when you’re around me?”

Jackie paused, “Probably not.”

Shauna let them move on from that depressing conversation topic and onto the next “So, what was the reason tonight?”

“Not a good one, probably.” Jackie sighed. She felt guilty. All the emotions and physicality she wanted with Shauna and felt with Shauna got put somewhere else, with someone else. It felt icky and wrong. She wasn’t exactly sure how it was wrong… she just knew it felt that way.

“Why don’t you tell me anyway?”

“You don’t want to know, Shauna.”

“I do.”

“It’s going to hurt you, baby,” Shauna paused and Jackie couldn’t even hear her breathing. Jackie was ashamed. Why did Shauna have to ask so many goddamn questions? She just wanted to hear her voice. She just wanted to talk to her.

“Please, Jax? Tell me?”

Jackie sighed and then took a deep breath. “I slept with someone.” There was a long silence, a lot like the one before. It went on for what felt like an eternity before Shauna responded.

“That’s okay, I think.” Jackie was shocked. Days ago, Shauna had told her that Jackie looking at somebody else drove her crazy… but this was okay?

“Really?”

“I mean… no. But I can’t really be mad. It happens. It’s just part of it.”

“Really?” Jackie asked again. She started to cry. Shauna was being so good about this, and Jackie had just been such a bitch. She had overthought everything.

“Jackie, babe. Please don’t cry. It’s okay, really. I’ve slept with people too. It’s good for us.” Jackie felt like every sip of alcohol she had that night had evaporated from her system. Slept with people? PLURAL? When the fuck did that happen?

“People?”

“Well... yeah.” Shauna sighed.

“How many people?”

“Jackie... Come on, now. I’m just saying it’s okay. I get it.”

“Yeah, I bet you do get it.”

“Hey. We’re supposed to be friends, remember? Friends don’t agree to never fuck anybody ever again.” Shauna was fucking scolding her? This was crazy.

“Yeah, actually. We are supposed to be friends, Shauna. Friends tell each other when they’re dating someone. Friends tell each other when they’ve had sex with someone. Friends actually communicate with each other and don’t make excuses when they omit the truth in a conversation.” The line was quiet again. She had every reason to hang up the phone after Jackie yelled at her, but she didn’t.

“Two. I have slept with two people this semester.”

“Adam and who?”

“Jackie, I didn’t do anything wrong. Why am I getting interrogated?”

“Just... please. I get it. I know I can’t be mad at you, I just want to know.”

“It was just some girl. I don’t remember her name.” Jackie took a deep breath, trying not to have a complete mental breakdown.

“Why’d you pick her?”

Shauna sighed, “She reminded me of you, Jackie. I get that probably breaks a fucking rule or something but that’s my fucking answer.” Jackie in any other scenario would’ve loved that answer, but not now. Now she was thinking about Shauna’s fingers in another girl. She was thinking about Adam’s dick inside of Shauna’s pussy. She wasn’t in the mood to feel flattered by much of anything.

“And Adam?” Shauna took a deep breath and Jackie could practically see her eyes roll over the phone. Those fucking eye rolls.

“Because he doesn’t remind me of you.” It was quiet, and Jackie couldn’t tell whether or not it was supposed to be hurtful.

“Got it. Good to know that warranted a second date.”

“A fifth actually,” Jackie laughed. Shauna was definitely intentionally being fucking hurtful now. It sucked. “Since we’re doing this... who did you sleep with?”

“A girl I met at the bar with Re. Charlie.”

“Why?” Jackie took her time thinking about her answer. She didn’t know why she chose Charlie over anybody else. Probably because she had her own shit going on. Neither of them were going to take their relationship for anything more than it was. It was easy.

“Because it’s simple. There aren’t any rules, there aren’t any lines I have to be careful not to come too close to. I can get what I need and I thought that I wouldn’t have to feel like shit about it. But clearly that isn’t working out.”

“Well I’m so fucking sorry about that, Jackie.” Jackie took a second to think. She wanted to know more. She wanted to know everything. It felt like both of them had nothing more to say but they’d rather fight and go around in circles than ever hang up the phone.

“So are you guys together?”

“No, Jackie. Fuck. He takes me out to dinner and sometimes we go to the bars. It’s not a serious thing.”

“But you like him?”

“Yes, Jackie. I like the man I’m going on dates with.”

“Goddamnit, Shauna. I’m just trying to talk to you about him. You don’t have to be so fucking defensive all the time. Sometimes you can just offer up information you know.” Jackie was not just trying to talk about him. Jackie knew Shauna had a reason to be defensive, but seriously what was she supposed to do? She knows nothing about Shauna’s life and it’s all because she just refuses to fucking talk. It’s painful.

“Yeah, well it feels like a really welcoming environment for a conversation.”

“Fine, then. You don’t want to talk about it, then fine. God fucking forbid I try to understand whatever the fuck is going on in your head.” Jackie hung up the phone before she could answer. She grabbed her notebooks off her desk and threw them across the room, hot tears covering her face seemingly out of nowhere. This felt like shit. This is not what she fucking signed up for, and she was tired of it. She got in the shower, changed into comfier clothes and passed out to sleep her terrible night away.

Chapter 39

Jackie woke up the next morning feeling sick, and she had a feeling it wasn't because of the alcohol. She sat up in bed and looked at the notebooks scattered over the floor. She remembered her and Shanua's conversation from the night before and immediately got on the phone.

"Hello?"

"Hey..."

"Jackie?"

"Yeah, hi. I'm sorry that I got so upset."

"Please... don't be sorry. I get it. I wish I had just told you stuff as it happened." Jackie took a second to figure out how to frame this conversation differently than she did last night.

"Did you really not tell me because I made you feel like you couldn't?"

"No. I know you would've tried to be supportive. It wasn't that... I'm just so scared to hurt you."

"Lying hurts me, Shauna."

"I know."

"More than anything. It's the lying."

"Yeah..." Shauna said quietly, "I know."

The line was quiet, "Do you love him?" Jackie asked. She had decided that if Shauna loved him, Jackie could back off. If Shauna was able to fall for somebody else like that, Jackie was going to let her have that.

"Jackie... of course not. I don't even know him." Jackie felt her body untense and her shoulders drop. She felt the relief deep in her chest.

"I'm sorry, Shauna."

"Don't apologize, Jax. Really."

"Okay. I should probably go."

"Okay. I love you, Jackie. I'm sorry."

"Yeah, me too... Love you too, Shipman."

Jackie got ready for the day and couldn't bring herself to be upset with Shauna. She had apologized, and Jackie appreciated that. It sucked that Shauna wouldn't talk to her. It sucked that Jackie felt like she knew nothing about her, but ultimately she knew why. Jackie was hesitant to tell her about the date with Syd. She was terrified to tell her about sleeping with

Charlie. The only difference was Jackie didn't have to risk losing Shauna's trust, and Shauna did. After everything, Jackie couldn't honestly say that if Shauna mentioned fucking somebody else and going on five dates with them she would've handled it well. What she did made sense, as fucked as it might have been. Around 5 she debated on calling Charlie and asking her to go to dinner. She figured, if Shauna was moving forward and going on multiple dates with somebody then maybe Jackie should too, but she knew she didn't want to go on a date with her. She wanted to go on a date with Shauna, or at least... She wanted Shauna to think she was going on a date with somebody else. It wasn't worth ruining it. She liked Charlie, even if it wasn't in a datey type of way. So instead of making that phone call, she busted through Renee's bedroom door and woke her up from her nap.

"Do you wanna get dinner?" Renee rolled over and rubbed her eyes.

"You can go grab pizza. Just take my keys."

"What? I can't drive, Re."

"You'll be alright."

Jackie laughed and sat down next to her on the bed, "You'd seriously just let me take your car without a license?"

"Sure. Just don't wreck it." Jackie shook her arm to get her attention.

"That's crazy, but also not what I meant. I want to go sit down somewhere. I'm bored. Please?"

Renee sat up, "You want me to get out of bed and get dressed right now? Actually?"

"Please?" Jackie put on her best pouty face.

Renee rolled her eyes, "Jackie Taylor asking me on a date. Who would've thought." Renee grinned and got out of bed, walking over to her closet to figure out what to wear.

"It'd be good for us to get out of the apartment don't you think? I'll buy."

"Of course you're buying, you're making me get up." Jackie laughed and Renee turned and squinted at her. "I'll go obviously, because I can't say no to you, but no funny business Jacqueline," Renee joked. Jackie rolled her eyes.

"Oh my god. Are you serious? In your dreams, baby." Renee threw her shirt at her and Jackie ran out of the room to avoid it. She was excited. Her and Renee never did anything like this, and it would be good to do something different. Jackie needed a change of routine, and their roommate date would be just that.

The next few weeks went by exactly as Jackie had expected them to. Shauna was making more of an effort to talk about stuff, and as awful as it might seem, Jackie hated it. She hated hearing about Adam. She hated hearing their plans to go to the movies. She hated thinking about them holding hands at dinner. She hated thinking about what happened when she let him sleep over. It made her sick, but she put on a brave face and pretended that it didn't. Her and Charlie didn't do much casual hanging out as friends and instead, anytime Jackie got out of a particularly difficult conversation about fucking Adam Martin she made a phone call, you know... for stress relief. Charlie returned the favor for reasons they never really discussed. They liked each other but it was very clear what their relationship was going to be.

It was transactional, and neither party seemed too upset about it. It was good for Jackie's relationship with Shauna. Her hookups with Charlie might have been the only thing keeping her from driving up to Brown and killing Adam with her bare hands. By the time Christmas break rolled around, Jackie felt pretty well adjusted. She was in control of her emotions, and finding good outlets to handle it all.

She got in the car with Van, without Tai this time who apparently had a family thing, and prepared herself for three weeks without Renee, Charlie and her very important stress relief. "Hey, baby. How are you doing?" Van asked.

"I'm good. I feel really good, actually. How are you?"

"Good, yeah. I'm working a lot now. Staying occupied." Van looked straight ahead at the road while she drove and Jackie knew she wasn't right.

"So you haven't talked to your mom I take it?" Van didn't take her eyes off the road as she shook her head no. "What's your plan for Christmas?"

"I'm going over to Tai's this year. Turner family Christmas." Van took a deep breath, very clearly stressed.

"What are you so worried about? They've always loved you."

"They loved Vanessa Palmer, the straight, above average goalie that helped the team get to nationals. They haven't met Van, their daughter's very dyke girlfriend who now has no aspirations and no family connections, leaching off of their daughter's college apartment."

"Oh, come on Van. Are you serious?"

"Yes. I'm very serious." Van looked at Jackie, "I'm freaking out."

Jackie put a hand on Van's shoulder. "I think you mean they haven't met Van, the girl who loves their daughter more than life itself, sacrificed a job with the only family she feels comfortable with in Ohio to be closer to her and might be the most passionate and charming person I know." Van smiled slightly and Jackie continued, "Come on, babe. Seriously. They're gonna love you."

Van looked over and Jackie and she seemed to be more relaxed. "Thank you, Jax. Really." Jackie nodded. The rest of the drive was spent singing along to the radio. They agreed they got every other song. Jackie got to play one song on her pop station, Van got to play one indie rock song, switching on and off. Shauna, Lottie and Nat weren't getting back for another two days, so Van and Jackie had the Matthew's mansion all to themselves. As nice as it sounded, it was a little intimidating. They were both terrified to break something when Lottie wasn't around, even though Lottie had assured them it was fine. Tai came over every possible second she could, and the three of them spent their time watching movies, listening to music and gossiping. It was fun. When Lottie, Nat and Shauna got home late on the 23rd, the three of them were already plastered. Van and Tai were practically screaming over each other to get Lottie's opinion on whether *Scream* or *Halloween* was better. Tai thought that *Scream* was revolutionary, but Van was settled on the importance of the classics. Lottie ignored them both and pulled them in for a tight group hug, dissolving the argument.

"Lottie, you peaceful little freak. This is so unfair." Van joked, putting on a grumpy act, but everybody knew she loved the affection. Jackie smiled and turned to Shauna, wrapping

her in a hug. She was a little drunk, and not in the whole trying to avoid her problems way, but in the fun, warm chested, full hearted way. Shauna chuckled and hugged her back.

“Miss me?” Shauna asked.

“Always.” Jackie smiled at her and turned to Nat, who was the only one not getting a hug. It seemed sad, so Jackie spread her arms. “C’mon, Nat. You’re up.”

She tried to put on a sour face but a little smile cracked through, “Don’t you dare fucking touch me, Taylor.” She backed away and Jackie stepped closer, wrapping her arms around the other girl. Nat was stiff as a board and she refused to hug back. Jackie laughed and let her go. She turned toward Lottie and jumped into her arms, more than excited to see her.

“I see you guys didn’t burn the place down... Thanks for that,” Lottie joked.

“Oh it was no problem, but if you smell any burnt popcorn... Tai did it.” Tai smacked Jackie’s arm and they all laughed it off. Jackie turned without explanation and walked to the kitchen to pour herself another drink. She wasn’t surprised that Shauna was right behind her. She grabbed the vodka bottle and started making Jackie’s drink for her. “What a gentleman...” Jackie said. Shauna smiled at her.

“So... you coming over for Christmakah?” The Shipmans were Jewish, but not really that religious. Shauna and her mom had combined the two holidays when her dad had left, starting new traditions for just the two of them.

Jackie squinted at her playfully, “You know, last time I got a formal invite. I should’ve known the chivalry was an act.”

“Oh, my mistake. Jackie Taylor...” Shauna straightened up a bit, “This is me officially inviting you over to the Shipman house for our annual Christmakah dinner.” Jackie smiled.

“Well in that case... I accept.” Shauna handed Jackie her drink and started to pour her own.

“So, there’s actually something I wanted to run by you.”

Jackie took a sip. “Okay... do I need to be worried?” Shauna shook her head.

“My mom managed to get Christmas and Christmas Eve off this year... so she wanted to do like a girl’s wine night on Christmas Eve. She really wants you there, and I didn’t really know how to tell her that it might not be a good idea.”

“Why wouldn’t it be a good idea? It sounds fun.” Shauna smiled.

“We have these rules, you know...” Jackie rolled her eyes.

“Aren’t we breaking the rules right now? Look at us, alone in a room with alcohol and we’re doing fine.”

“I’m not drunk, dear. We’re not breaking any rules until I take a drink.”

“Okay, so we are not breaking any rules... yet.” Jackie winked at her, which was supposed to be a joke, but apparently by the look on Shauna’s face, she didn’t take it that way. “Kidding! Sorry. It’s your mom Shauna. Of course I’ll spend Christmas Eve with you guys.”

“We’re gonna be drinking, Jax. I’m not gonna be able to drive you home. My mom would be weirded out if you didn’t stay in my room. She would know something was up. I just don’t want to put you... or us, I guess in a position you don’t want to be in.” Jackie thought about it. She could handle this, right? It was a wine night with her mom. They’d crash early and Jackie would sleep on the floor.

“I’ll sleep on the floor. We’ll figure it out. I’m not gonna disappoint your mom. I couldn’t. I’m excited to see her.” Shauna smiled softly at her and took a sip.

“She’s excited to see you. I am too. I’ve missed you, you know.” Jackie smiled.

“You’re breaking the rules,” she said teasingly, pointing at Shauna’s cup. She saw Shauna’s lips pull into an amused grin as she made her way back into the living room. The rest of the night was easy. It was fun. Shauna hung out for her one drink, waited about an hour and then drove herself home. Jackie crashed on the couch, and the couples went up to bed. Tonight was easy, Christmas Eve was going to be the real test, though. Drunk and alone together in her bedroom. She was a little terrified of it. It was definitely breaking the rules... but for Ms. Shipman, Jackie would probably do anything. She could keep it together.

The next morning, Van made everybody breakfast. Jackie was woken up bright and early by her demands for entertainment while she cooked. Jackie couldn’t complain too much, as she was sitting on the counter getting first dibs on everything Van whipped up. Soon enough, everybody was gathered around the table and inevitably, the conversation got to be about Shauna and their Christmas Eve plans. Jackie claimed to have it under control, and she pretty much got laughed at by everybody in the room. Once the laughter died down, she took the opportunity. “So, this Adam guy...” Jackie said in between bites. Tai locked eyes with her across the table, seeming amused.

“What about him?” Lottie asked.

“What do you guys think of him?” Jackie looked between Nat and Lottie, waiting for a response that took way too long. They looked at each other and Lottie spoke up.

“He’s... nice.” Jackie looked at Nat, who physically grimaced. They didn’t like him. Jackie could’ve jumped for joy at that miserable look on Nat’s face. She knew it didn’t mean much, because Nat also didn’t like her much, but still. She turned to look at Tai, who was trying not to grin. Jackie smiled, shocked at their response. She had been expecting them to love him, and be happy Shauna wasn’t in the crazy toxic relationship she had with Jackie. Nat was doing everything in her power to avoid Jackie’s gaze, and Lottie looked like she felt guilty for talking bad about him with her.

“You guys fucking hate him,” Van said, laughing at them.

“No. We don’t hate him.” Lottie looked pointedly at Nat, looking for her to agree but she shrugged.

“He’s boring. He’s fine... just boring,” Nat said, which Lottie seemed proud of her for. THAT was the best thing she had to say about the guy? Jackie considered it. She was okay with that. Jackie could compete with boring.

“Well... maybe boring is good for her, right?” Tai offered. Jackie stared at her, trying to figure out what her angle was, then she remembered that she was supposed to be Shauna’s

friend. Maybe there was no angle. She wasn't supposed to be competing.

Nat's laugh distracted her. She said, "Shauna is like... the opposite of boring."

"She literally just reads... like constantly. That sounds boring to me." Van said.

"No. The way her brain works... she doesn't even understand what boring is. It's all kinds of complicated up there." Lottie said, shooting Jackie a subtle smile in the process. Nat and Lottie left for something after breakfast, leaving Tai and Jackie to clean up breakfast. It was only fair since Van cooked.

"So... how are we feeling about this Shauna/Adam sitch?" Van asked. Jackie immediately felt Tai's eyes on her.

"It's... fine, I guess. I just wish she'd talk to me about it." Van laughed at her, "What?"

"Well... why? Why would you want to know that stuff?"

"Because we're friends. I don't like feeling like I don't know what's going on in her life."

Tai and Van made eye contact before Tai spoke, "So let's say Shauna did talk to you about it. Let's say she told you everything he said to her, told you when they had sex, told you that she enjoyed it..." Jackie's face dropped and her stomach churned. "Would that be good for your quote unquote 'friendship'?"

"Okay, point taken. But lying to me isn't good for our friendship either."

Van snickered, "Jackie I don't think a lot of things have been very good for your 'friendship' in like a decade." She used air quotes again.

Jackie threw the dish rag at her jokingly, "Would you guys stop it with the quotes. We're friends. No quotes."

"Whatever you say, Taylor," Tai said, laughing as she walked into the living room.

Chapter 40

Jackie got Lottie and Nat to drop her off. She took two hours trying to figure out what to wear, but settled on elegant but comfortable. A pair of silky green pants with a thin black turtleneck. She had packed a bag for the night and for Christmakah dinner the next day and prepared herself mentally to keep her hands off of Shauna. It was 8pm and she had eaten dinner with everyone already, now it was just dessert and wine with the Shipmans. She knocked on the door and waited for someone to open it. She watched Shauna's shadow through the window and realized how hard tonight was going to be. The door swung open and showed Shauna with her hair up in a low bun, blue linen pants and a white short sleeve shirt that her chest absolutely filled out, and that her biceps seemed to pop out of. She looked fucking beautiful. The whole look... everything was working for her. She had two pieces of hair framing her face, her eyes were so full and dark, and her lips were gleaming softly like she had just put chapstick on. Jackie's eyes were glued to the girl, unable to figure out what to look at but the subject was very clear. Shauna motherfucking Shipman. Her breath caught in her throat. "You can just walk in, you know. You always used to." Jackie looked up at her eyes, remembering how many times she had barged through the door without so much as a knock or a call to warn them. It used to be her home too, maybe it could be again. She smiled and gave Shauna a hug, a friendly gesture that also meant she had an excuse to feel the girl's body pressed against her. Shauna held on to her a little too tightly and took a deep breath.

"Next time I will." Shauna nodded and made room for Jackie to walk past her. She felt Shauna's gaze locked on her body as she walked into the kitchen.

"Jackie Taylor!" Ms. Shipman ran to tackle her into a hug the second she saw her. This kind of treatment was something she had never gotten from another adult. A parent who was genuinely excited to see her walk through the door. "I'm so glad you came! I thought we'd start the holidays off a little early."

"Seriously, Ms. Shipman, it's good to be home. Thank you for thinking of me."

She pressed her hand against her chest and smiled wide. "Always, baby." Ms. Shipman walked over and grabbed three wine glasses. Jackie saw a pie, a cake, and some pudding displayed nicely on the counter.

"Are we tearing into these?" Shauna asked from behind her, she had a grin on her face when Jackie turned around to face her, and she had really forgotten how good she looked. She let her eyes run over her body again, as fast as she could to not be too obvious and then forced herself to snap out of it.

"Yes, yes. Shauna honey can you serve everything please?" Shauna moved behind Jackie in the small kitchen, touching her lower back as she moved past. It was a nothing touch. There were no bad intentions and it seemed pretty mindless, but Jackie's skin tingled under Shauna's fingers. Jackie followed her, grabbing plates and forks and helped dish out all the desserts. They talked, listened to Ms. Shipman's favorite music, some motown and a little bit of Rod Stewart. The wine was amazing, apparently she had splurged a little bit on it and it was pretty obvious. Unfortunately they ran through it in a little under an hour.

“Well, girls... this is why we can’t have nice things.” Ms. Shipman laughed as she pulled her usual box wine out of the fridge. The night was pretty much perfect. Aside from Jackie’s inability to tear her eyes away from Shauna in that fucking outfit, she and Shauna were doing good. Jackie was honestly pretty proud of them for it. As the night calmed down, they all sat down to watch a movie. Ms. Shipman in her recliner and Jackie next to Shauna on the couch. It took about 10 minutes for her to start snoring. It was hard to blame her for it though, she worked the night shift the night prior and spent all day baking for them and cooking for dinner tomorrow. Jackie heard it first and nudged Shauna with her foot, gesturing towards her mom. She was probably the best person she knew, and Jackie was glad that she was so happy, even if she was as overworked as always. Shauna stood up, giving Jackie a ridiculously good view of her ass in those pants and walked over to the recliner, gently nudging her mom awake and leading her to her bedroom. While they were down the hall, Jackie took their plates and their glasses and walked them to the kitchen. She refilled hers and Shauna’s glasses and quickly hand washed the rest of the dishes by the time Shauna got back.

“Hey, I was gonna do that. You didn’t have to,” Shauna walked over to her and hopped up to sit on the counter as she finished drying them. If Jackie leaned over just a few inches, her thigh would be pressed up against Jackie’s ribs. She was desperate for the touch, but resisted.

“It’s okay. Least I can do.” Jackie didn’t dare to look up at her, knowing that seeing those big brown eyes looking down at her with the intensity they always seem to carry would definitely result in Jackie in between the girl’s thighs.

“Jackie?” Shauna wanted her to look at her. She took a deep breath and looked up and she felt her knees practically go weak. Fuck she looked good. Jackie quickly moved her eyes away from Shauna and onto her wine glass, which she grabbed quickly and took a drink. She looked back up at Shauna, who was grinning now, apparently knowing the effect she was causing.

“Yeah?” Jackie looked at her as she spoke and then took another drink, focusing intently on putting the dishes away now.

“I’m sorry for asking you to break the rules.”

“You didn’t. Your mom did, and she doesn’t know about the rules.” Shauna tapped her fingers against her wine glass absentmindedly and Jackie could tell she was thinking about something. She reached up to put the plates away and turned back around to Shauna’s eyes, dark as she had ever seen them and glued to where Jackie’s ass had just been. Jackie swallowed hard and Shauna’s eyes made their way very slowly up Jackie’s body to her eyes. “I’ll make an exception to the rules for your mom anyday.” Jackie smiled and in an attempt to stay as far away from Shauna as she could, hopped up on the opposite counter.

Shauna grinned playfully at her, “But not for me?” Jackie squinted at her.

“We made the rules together, remember?” Shauna nodded, she looked sad, her big doe eyes no longer playful. She finished her glass and refilled it, hopping down from the counter to do so. Jackie took another drink and watched Shauna move across the kitchen to the fridge next to her. Jackie was nervous. The energy in the room was heightened and she had no idea where this was going to go. “Does your boyfriend know how little you like our rules?”

“How do you know I don’t like the rules?”

Jackie smiled, taking another drink. "You told me." Shauna was confused, trying to remember when she would've said that.

"The voicemail?" Jackie nodded and she sighed, "Apparently I said a lot of things on the voicemail."

"That you did." Jackie finished her glass and handed it to Shauna to refill for her, which she did.

"He's not my boyfriend," Shauna said as the glass filled. Jackie rolled her eyes and Shauna shut the fridge, making her way over to her. Jackie reached for the glass and Shauna pulled it away. She was standing like 4 inches in front of Jackie's knees, and without thinking, Jackie instinctively parted them. Shauna noticed it and the corner of her mouth ticked up into a crooked grin. She took a step closer and Jackie leaned all the way back into the cabinets, trying so hard to be good. "He's not." Shauna whispered it and held Jackie's glass in front of her. Jackie stared at her and took the glass without breaking eye contact, but Shauna didn't move. Her eyes searched Shauna's face for some kind of clue as to what she was trying to do, or what she was prepared to do. Jackie took a sip of her wine and Shauna's hands slowly reached out to the sides of Jackie's thighs. Jackie watched the touch darken the other girl's eyes and she gasped. Shauna ran her hands up the outsides of her thighs to her hips, grabbing them roughly. Jackie let out a surprised, quiet moan and Shauna leaned into her, putting pressure in her hips with her thumbs and grabbing her ass. Jackie still had the wine glass in one hand, but wrapped the other around the back of Shauna's neck, pulling her face into Jackie's chest. Shauna sighed and moved her hands up to Jackie's waist. Shauna pulled away, locking eyes with her and the sadness inside of them was like a knife through Jackie's heart. Her eyes watered and she felt her face get hot. Shauna turned away and walked over to the opposite counter, leaning over it with her eyes fixed on the wall. Jackie took a deep breath and finished her drink. When she jumped down from the counter she was made painfully aware of the wetness between her thighs. She sighed.

"I'm sorry, Jax."

"No, don't be. Really. You didn't do anything wrong." Shauna took a deep breath and placed her head in her hands. Jackie reached out and touched her back, feeling Shauna relax at the feeling. 'Hey,' Jackie reached at her jaw, pulling her face up to look at her, "We're just drunk. It's okay. Let's just go to bed, okay?" Shauna nodded and dumped the rest of her wine.

They got upstairs and Jackie grabbed her baggy pj pants and sweatshirt she had packed to sleep in and went to the bathroom to change. When she got back, Shauna had made a bed on the floor with blankets and pillows and made herself comfortable on it. "Hey... you don't have to do that. I can sleep on the floor."

Shauna rolled her eyes at Jackie. "I am not making you sleep on the floor, Jackie." Jackie held eye contact with Shauna, waiting for her to change her mind. "Seriously, just get in bed. I'm good down here." Jackie knew she wasn't going to win this one, so she climbed into Shauna's bed by herself. She rested her head on the pillow and as quietly as she could, breathed in Shauna's scent. She felt her eyes start to water again and she reached for the light.

"You good if I turn this off?"

“Yeah, I’m good.” Jackie did her best to allow herself to fall asleep, but it just felt so lonely. Sleeping in Shauna’s bed by herself, when Shauna was just a few feet away was actually physically painful. She tossed and turned until 4 in the morning, and she could hear Shauna doing the same. This was stupid.

“Shauna?”

“Yeah?”

“Can you come to bed?” It was silent, and Shauna was seemingly debating on whether or not it was a good idea. ‘Please?’ That was all it took. Shauna got into bed with her, careful not to touch her at all and layed still next to her. Jackie sighed. Fuck it, she thought. She reached behind her and grabbed Shauna’s hand, pulling her tight against Jackie’s body and wrapping the girl’s fingers around her stomach. Shauna’s face was pressed against the back of Jackie’s neck and hearing her irregular breathing was driving Jackie crazy. She was doing that to her. Not her fuck ass boyfriend, not some bitch she picked up at a bar, but Jackie. Jackie wasn’t even doing anything and Shauna couldn’t catch her breath. She was proud of it, even though she knew it was unfair to be. Shauna moved her lower half to press against the back of Jackie’s legs and her ass and once she had accepted that this was okay, and gotten over her 30 seconds of shock, she nuzzled in. She held Jackie tightly, daring to reach her pinky underneath her sweatshirt to touch her skin. Jackie took a deep breath, finally comfortable, “Thank you.”

Shauna nodded against her and said, “Good night, baby.” Jackie sighed happily and fell asleep almost immediately.

Jackie woke up to Shauna’s hand underneath her shirt, wrapped around her tit. She could feel how wet she was almost immediately and she knew she had to move. If Shauna woke up like that she would probably be embarrassed and apologize, which is not something Jackie wanted, or if they stayed like this Jackie was worried she wouldn’t be able to resist her own impulses.

Shauna mumbled something in her sleep and her hand tightened on Jackie’s tit, pulling her closer. Jackie moaned almost silently, even more aware of the situation in between her legs. She reached up and grabbed Shauna’s hand, slowly moving it out from underneath her shirt, and she swiftly got out of bed without waking Shauna, who pouted in her sleep and reached for the spot Jackie had just left. Jackie stood there, smiling at her. She really was beautiful. Jackie reached down and tucked her back in, covering her with the blanket and planting a soft kiss to her temple. She couldn’t resist it, and she didn’t really see the harm at the end of the day. She made her way downstairs and saw a note Shauna’s mom had left.

At soup kitchen. Be back at 3. Love you girls, Merry Christmakah!

Jackie looked at the clock, it was 12:30. Two and a half hours at their disposal... Jackie stared at the note trying to find her self control. Shauna has a boyfriend, and they have put so much time and energy into this friendship. It would be a mistake. She wasn’t drunk, she wasn’t high. She knew that there would be no excuse, but the memory of Shauna’s hand grabbing her tit and caressing her ass, Jackie’s chest pressed into her face. Fuck. She had to have spent 15 minutes staring at the note, hands clenched around the edge of the counter just debating. She decided to redirect and call Van. She dialed Lottie’s house number on Shauna’s phone and heard it ring.

“Matthew’s residence, this is Charlotte.”

“Hey, Lot it’s me. Merry Christmas!”

“Hey, Jackie. Merry Christmakah to you guys. What’s up?”

“Did Van leave yet?”

“No, she’s right here. Hold on.”

Jackie waited a few seconds, staring again at that note, then the clock. It was 1 now.

“Jackie! Hey, how was your night?” Jackie hesitated. How was her night?

“It was good, yeah.”

“Bullshit. Did you guys fuck?”

“No! No, we didn’t.”

“Did you kiss her?”

“No. We just... slept in the same bed. There was some touching but you know, we showed restraint.”

“Mhm. What exactly do you mean by touching?”

“Well there was a moment last night. It almost happened. Like really it almost happened, but we didn’t do anything. She just kind of grabbed my ass, but we stopped. She tried to sleep on the floor, it just didn’t really work out.”

Van laughed, “How does one try to sleep on the floor?”

“Neither of us could get to sleep, so I told her to just get in bed. All we did was cuddle and then this morning I woke up to her hand on my tit.”

“Oh, sweet Jackie. You try so hard.” Van tsked into the phone. Jackie rolled her eyes.

She lowered her voice to a whisper, “Her mom is going to be gone until 3. Convince me to not be a dumbass, please?”

“I’ll do my best but you make it hard. Talk to me.”

Jackie turned to face the stairs, stretching the cord just in case Shauna woke up and decided to come downstairs, “Van she touched me ONCE and I felt more than I ever have with anybody. Like actually I think if my options were a light graze of her hand on my back or sex I would really really struggle choosing.” Van laughed.

“You are so fucking whipped.”

“Not helping.”

“Jackie, if you thought sleeping with her was a good idea you wouldn’t have put so much effort into not doing it. Why did you put the rules in place?”

“Because I know that if we’re friends there’s a better chance that we won’t ever stop talking to each other again. There’s less chance to hurt each other that way, and less chance of falling out again. I can’t lose her.”

“What has changed since then?”

Jackie thought about it. Nothing about the reasoning has changed. If anything, there are more reasons not to go back upstairs now. “She has a boyfriend now. I’m sleeping with Charlie, we’re adjusting.”

“Okay...” Van was expecting Jackie to continue.

“So, I probably shouldn’t go back upstairs.” Van laughed and Jackie took a deep breath, looking longingly at Shauna’s bedroom. “Van, I hope this isn’t TMI, but I have this psychological need for her to touch me again. What the fuck am I gonna do?”

“TMI for sure, but also like... therapy?”

“You want me to go sit down and explain to an adult professional my deep desire to have lesbian sex with Shauna?”

“Well when you say it like that it feels like a much different thing.”

“Yeah, not happening. So... how are you feeling about Christmas with the Turners?”

“Good, I think. Lottie helped me pick out an outfit— sorry... Lottie and Nat helped me pick out an outfit.”

“Have they been there listening the whole time?”

“Well they can’t hear what you’re saying... So no?”

“Oh, god. Okay. Tell Nat not a word of this to Shauna. I gotta go. Thanks. I promise to stay out of her bed, or you know the couch, or the counter... Fuck.” Jackie could only think about all the times they fucked in this house in high school.

“Take a cold shower or something, Jesus Christ.”

“Love you too, Van. If you need an emergency extraction today let me know. I’ll make Shauna drive me to go get you.”

“Deal. See ya, Merry Hanukkah.” Jackie hung up the phone and took a deep breath before starting to make coffee. While it was brewing, she made herself very occupied with anything that kept her downstairs. She organized the cupboards, picked up the living room and even fluffed their throw pillows. When she ran out of things to distract herself, she poured coffee into two mugs and brought them upstairs. Shauna was still asleep, sprawled over the entire bed. Jackie smiled at her and just watched her for a minute before setting the coffee down on the nightstand and grabbing her clothes.

She made her way into the bathroom and started the shower, grabbing one of Shauna’s extra towels and hanging it up. Jackie got undressed and looked at herself in the mirror. She touched herself in all the places Shauna had touched her last night, but they didn’t feel the same. It didn’t do it any justice. She wanted more... she needed more. Maybe she really did need Charlie to get through this friendship with Shauna, or at least somewhere to release her frustrations. When the mirror started to fog, Jackie got in the shower. All she could think about was Shauna’s face buried in her chest. Part of her wished Shauna would’ve just instigated something. There’s no way she could’ve told her to stop once she started. She closed her eyes and imagined herself on the kitchen counter. Instead of freezing and waiting

to see what Shauna would do, she wrapped her legs around her back. She grabbed Shauna's shirt and pulled it over her head. Jackie thought about Shauna's tits probably spilling out of her bra. She thought about Shauna's hands pulling at the bottom of Jackie's shirt, lifting it up over her head and her lips finding Jackie's neck. Jackie's hand reached down, trailing down her tits and her stomach and she leaned against the wall, letting the water run down her body. Maybe this is what she needed. Maybe this would be enough of a release... she just had to be quiet. Jackie started to rub her clit, getting completely lost in her daydream of how she wished things had gone.

Jackie held Shauna's face into her bare chest, saying 'This is probably a bad idea, baby.' Shauna kissed her tits, running her lips over the soft skin. Shauna's hands reached for the tops of her thighs, gently pushing her legs further apart. Shauna kissed up to her ear, 'I'll stop if you want me to stop. Do you want me to stop?' Shauna was teasing her. Jackie tried to grind her hips into Shauna's legs but Shauna wouldn't allow it. 'No, baby. Tell me you want me.' Of course Jackie wanted her, but she also liked to be teased and pushed. She was kind of enjoying this... wanting to take her time and savor every moment. Shauna kissed her neck, running her hands on the insides of Jackie's thigh. Jackie shuddered at the touch. 'Come on, baby. Do you want me?' Jackie looked at her and nodded. Shauna stopped, pushing down on Jackie's hips. She grinned, dark eyes staring into her soul, 'I want words. Come on, baby, use your words.'

It took everything in her to not moan in the shower. She was biting down hard on her lip, her hand on the shower wall the only thing keeping her from falling over. She was so close, and Shauna hadn't even touched her yet, even in her fantasy. She was so fucked.

'Do you want me, babygirl?' Jackie nodded her head eagerly. 'Words, baby, you can do it, come on.' She was smiling, she loved watching Jackie come undone. Jackie opened her mouth and started to speak, 'Yes— I, "when Shauna placed her hand on the crotch of Jackie's pants. Jackie's breath hitched and she waited for Shauna to give her more. 'C'mon, baby. Say it. What do you want?' Jackie moaned, 'You. You.' Shauna shook her head and laughed at her, 'Full sentence. What do you want me to do, baby?' Jackie started again, 'Please, I— I want you to fuck—' Shauna rubbed her clit through her pants and Jackie couldn't finish her sentence, 'Want me to what?' 'Fuck me. Please. Fuck me.' Jackie pretty much yelled it, trying to get it all out before Shauna cut her off again. Shauna smiled and pressed her hand hard into Jackie's crotch, rubbing her fingers in circles on her clit.

Jackie bit down hard on her arm as she came. She let the orgasm shake through her and surprisingly, did a pretty good job of staying quiet. She finished her shower and changed into her nicer clothes. She finished her coffee as she got ready in the bathroom, and by the time she got out it was 2:30 and Shauna was awake. Jackie walked into the bedroom and Shauna was sitting up, leaning against the headboard drinking the coffee Jackie had left her.

"Good morning," Jackie smiled.

Shauna looked her up and down, "You look nice."

Jackie blushed, "Thank you..." Shauna's eyes lingered on Jackie's body and Jackie looked at the clock, "Your mom should be home any minute now. She left a note downstairs."

"Yeah she said she was volunteering." Shauna looked away and Jackie set her dirty clothes down on her floor. "Want to help me pick out an outfit?" Shauna asked.

Jackie thought about it, specifically about the things Shauna had written in her journal. She thought about how much Shauna had hated Jackie trying to micromanage her. She was trying to be a better friend. “No, that’s okay. Surprise me.” Shauna smiled and got out of bed. Her shorts had ridden up and half her ass was out, something that Jackie’s eyes immediately clung to. She was a fucking mess. Luckily, the door opened downstairs before Shauna could notice it. The rest of the day went pretty smoothly. After dinner, the three of them sat in a haze in the living room, stuffed and exhausted. It wasn’t a surprise to any of them that Ms. Shipman passed out in her recliner. This time, they left her there to sleep and headed out back to smoke a joint in the cold. Shauna lit it, took a hit and passed it to Jackie. The imagery of Shauna’s lips wrapped around the joint was making Jackie crazy. She needed to talk about anything else.

“I’m really glad you’re here, Jax.” Shauna looked at her and smiled.

“Me too.” Jackie took a hit and continued, “I was a little surprised to get the invite, honestly.”

“What? Why?” Shauna seemed genuinely confused.

“I was just surprised you didn’t want your boyfriend here. I thought he’d probably be meeting your mom.”

Shauna rolled her eyes, “God, Jax. We go on dates sometimes. It is not a relationship. We’re not dating. He’s definitely not going to meet my mom.” Shauna’s lips wrapped around the joint again, and Jackie was entranced. She was angry, and that didn’t help either. “And even if I did invite him, why would that mean you wouldn’t get one?”

“I don’t know...” Jackie wasn’t really sure how to respond.

“My mom would never allow that.” Shauna smiled at her own joke and Jackie rolled her eyes.

“Oh but not you. You’d be all about it, huh?”

Shauna sighed. “I hope I never have to spend another holiday without you, Jackie Taylor.” Jackie smiled and took a hit. Shauna’s eyes were locked on her lips and Jackie wanted so badly for her to just do what they both wanted her to, but she didn’t.

“I hope so too.”

Chapter 41

The next week was spent with Jackie pretty much splitting time between Lottie's and Shauna's. She decided that as long as Shauna's mom was home, there was no real risk of them doing much. The plan was pretty much working. The tension was fucking crazy, but it was good to be around them again, and she realized how badly she wanted to be a part of their family. Since Christmas, Van had spent a good amount of time at the Turner's house. Apparently it went really well, something that Tai was beyond excited about.

On New Year's Eve, they had all made plans to go out to the bar together. Shauna volunteered to drive them, which was probably a good thing. They couldn't break any rules that way, although Jackie was a little disappointed at the lost possibility of it. It was dangerous, but she liked it in some fucked up way. Jackie had invited Re, but she couldn't get off of work. It was going to be her and Shauna, all night. Obviously, Jackie rode shotgun and controlled the music in the car. She was tipsy, but not terribly drunk. She felt like she had to have control over the situation. Shauna was driving, but that didn't mean that she shouldn't also make an effort. When they got to the bar, Jackie sat down next to Shauna while the couples went to the dance floor.

"I offered to drive so you could have fun. You can drink, Jax," Jackie smiled.

"Why wouldn't I be able to have fun if you were drinking?" Jackie asked, playing dumb with a teasing smile on her face.

"Well... the last time we both decided to drink it almost ended poorly."

"How do you think your boyfriend would feel knowing you're so easily swayed after a few drinks?" Shauna rolled her eyes.

"Not my boyfriend." Shauna looked at the bartender and ordered two shots and a vodka cran. "C'mon, Jax. You've had like one drink. Seriously, my offer to drive is a total waste if you make yourself miserable too."

"You're miserable?" That made Jackie a little sad.

Shauna smiled. "How could I be? I'm with you." The bartender set her shots and her drink down in front of her.

"I'll take this if you take the other one with me."

"I can't, I'm driving."

"It's one shot and we're gonna be here for at least three hours. Please?" Jackie pouted her lip at her and that was all it took.

Shauna picked up the shot and they took it together. Jackie spent the night talking to Shauna. She didn't even feel drawn to the dance floor. All she wanted was the girl sitting next to her. When Shauna left to go to the bathroom, Tai showed up drunk off her ass and ordered Jackie three shots.

“You need to fucking catch up, Taylor. Where the hell are you?” Tai asked.

“She’s busy with her ‘friend’,” Van said, putting it in air quotes.

“Good lord. Just bring her to the dance floor. We miss you.” That was probably the sweetest thing Tai had ever said to her, so it was hard to resist.

“You guys think me and Shauna on the dance floor together is a good idea?” Jackie asked. Van shrugged. “Guys, last time we tried both being on the dance floor we fucked in the bathroom. That’s kind of what we’re avoiding.”

All of a sudden Shauna was behind her. “And if I promise not to fuck you in the bathroom?” Jackie turned around and her face turned red and Van started laughing uncontrollably.

“See? You’re good. Let’s take our shots and then will you PLEASE go with us?” Jackie looked at Shauna who laughed and nodded her head to the shots.

“C’mon, Jax. Dance with me?” Jackie didn’t know that was an option. She was sold. Her and Tai took their shots and they made their way towards the DJ. Shauna guided her by her hand and they danced pressed up against each other. As the night went on, Jackie felt the need to get closer and closer to her, but the harder she tried, the less Shauna let her do. Jackie would let her hands wander to Shauna’s ass, and Shauna would spin her to keep her away. Jackie would try to turn around and hold Shauna’s head near her neck, and Shauna circled around her. Jackie was getting frustrated and apparently Shauna could tell. She laughed and whispered in her ear. “I promised I wouldn’t fuck you, and if I let you grind your ass into me I’m gonna crack.” Jackie’s face fell, thinking about how badly she wanted to push it. Shauna wouldn’t though. Jackie was drunk and Shauna wouldn’t take advantage of that, no matter how badly Jackie might want her to. When the countdown started, Jackie turned around and Shauna wrapped her hands around her lower back.

“Be my New Year’s kiss?” Jackie asked. Shauna took a second to respond.

“I don’t know, Jax. You’re drunk.”

“As a friend...” Shauna still looked hesitant.

Jackie batted her eyelashes and delivered the line that she knew would get her what she wanted. “It’ll mean nothing. Just a friendly kiss. Are you really gonna make me kiss some random in a bar?” Shauna’s eyes went dark and as people started to countdown from 3, Shauna leaned in and kissed her. Shauna tried at first to keep it innocent, but Jackie never wanted a friendly kiss. She grabbed the back of Shauna’s head and deepened the kiss. It was so perfect she could’ve cried. Shauna moaned and Jackie knew she’d won at least for a second. She tried to push her tongue into Shauna’s mouth and she let her hands move to grab at her skin under her shirt.

“Happy New Year!” The bar screamed out, bringing them back to reality and pulling them apart. Jackie looked up at Shauna and she knew that it was definitely a good thing that she was driving. They didn’t say another word to each other until she got them home safely. Lottie and Nat ran up to their bedroom and Tai looked at Jackie.

“Thank you for hanging with us. Sorry if I peer pressured you or whatever.”

“No need... to thank me or to apologize. I’m always gonna hang with you. The room’s yours by the way. Have fun, kids.” Van kissed her hand and gently slapped Jackie’s cheek with it.

“You’re the best, Taylor.” Jackie laughed and Shauna came to sit down next to her as Tai and Van ran up the stairs.

“Jackie... I feel like we shouldn’t have done that,” Shauna said once they were alone.

“It was a friendly kiss. It doesn’t have to mean anything.” It meant everything. Jackie had needed it so badly that it felt like she was going to die without it. Shauna looked at her like she knew exactly what she was thinking.

“It didn’t feel friendly... and you’re drunk.”

“I am not that drunk.”

Shauna sighed, “Yes you absolutely are. You struggled getting into the car.”

“I tripped!” Shauna let her have it, but Jackie knew she was kind of fucked up. Fucked up enough to ask all the questions she wanted. “So... what was friendlier, our New Year’s kiss or your goodbye kiss with Adam before you left for break.” Shauna shook her head.

“I am not going to engage in this conversation, Jackie. I didn’t drink so that I could resist you for this exact reason.

“You told me I could ask you whatever I wanted.”

“That was about Jeff. I don’t remember offering that with Adam.”

Jackie waved her off. “Do you like it better with a man?”

Shauna shook her head, “It’s not like that.”

“Did you like it better with Jeff?”

“No.” Shauna snapped her head to look at her, shocked by the question. “I didn’t like it better with him, Jax.”

“So... what do you like better? Sex with Jeff or sex with Adam?” Jackie was asking questions that had answers she knew would hurt her. Shauna shook her head but Jackie continued, ‘Does he make you cum?’ Shauna’s head snapped up at her. She squinted at her and it looked like she stopped herself from responding. These questions were hurtful, and Jackie wanted them to be. Shauna wanted to hurt her back, but she didn’t. She just stayed quiet. “No, come on. This is fun. Let’s see. What about the girl? Where does she rank?”

“You know what? If you still want to know all this in the morning I will tell you whatever you want. If tomorrow, you think this is the best thing for our friendship, I promise I will answer whatever questions you have.”

Jackie held out her pinky, “Promise?”

Shauna smiled a little and interlocked pinkies, “Promise.” Jackie took a deep breath and layed down, head on Shauna’s lap. Shauna sighed and ran her hands through Jackie’s hair until she fell asleep.

The next morning, they woke up before everybody else. Jackie woke up to her head rested on Shauna's stomach and her arms wrapped around the girl's waist. Shauna's hand cupped Jackie's face like even in her sleep she couldn't manage to take her hand away. Jackie shook her awake gently

"Hey... Wanna go get coffee?" Jackie stared at her as she started the process of sitting up. She ran her hand through Jackie's hair one last time and Jackie felt her thigh muscles as she stretched her legs. The thoughts that flooded her head were enough to convince her maybe she should let go. She got up off the couch and walked to the Matthew's laundry room to grab clothes for her and Shauna. She intentionally picked a pair of shorts that were a little snug to give to Shauna, relishing over the way her thighs were going to look in them. She grabbed two sweatshirts and a pair of jeans for herself. When she got back to the living room she tossed the clothes at Shauna and walked up to the bathroom, trying not to make too much noise and wake the rest of the house. She got dressed quickly and walked downstairs, immediately finding Shauna in the living room. Those fucking shorts. Yeah, she looked just as good as Jackie had hoped. They ran out to the local coffee shop to grab their usuals and sat in the car, not wanting to go back just yet.

"Do you remember much of last night?" Shauna asked, a little smile on her lips.

"Yes. I remember all of it."

Shauna raised her eyebrows, "Really?"

"Yeah, Shipman. Some of us can handle our liquor. I was drunk, not blackout." Shauna laughed, "You could've answered my questions," Jackie said with an eye roll.

"Yeah? You still wanna know?" Yes. She wanted to know, but maybe that wouldn't end well.

"Yes, but no." Shauna looked at her.

"You can ask me whatever you want to, Jax. I'm not gonna lie to you."

"Friends tell friends this stuff, right? I mean, I used to tell you everything about Jeff." Shauna nodded her head, preparing herself for what Jackie was going to ask. "Do you like it better with men?"

"Not necessarily. I mean, it's just different. I don't know... it's hard to explain."

"Try?" Shauna took a deep breath.

"Obviously there are just different parts, but with men it's almost too easy. Like..." Shauna was hesitant to keep talking. Jackie thought about how easily she must've been able to get Adam off. It was always so easy with Jeff. Jackie nodded, giving Shauna permission to continue, "It's good. Like, it feels fuller... I guess. But it just isn't the same. It feels good but it's hard to..." Shauna looked up at Jackie, being cautious before just going for it, "to get there, you know?" Adam couldn't make her cum? That was upsetting and relieving all at once. On one hand, the only way Jackie was living through this friendship they had was because Charlie was like a fucking work horse and apparently Shauna didn't have that, but on the other that meant that Jackie still had the upper hand.

"He doesn't... he can't make you cum?" Jackie locked eyes with her.

“Well it’s not like it feels bad. I still feel good, I just don’t cum every time.”

Jackie was confused. She couldn’t understand how that could be good for her. “But he does? Every time?” Shauna nodded and Jackie’s head flooded with new terrible thoughts. Did he cum in her mouth like Jeff used to do to her? Or on her tits? No, Shauna and Adam would actually fuck, so probably her stomach, or Jesus Christ... inside her. God this was fucking awful. Jackie looked out the window and decided to keep those thoughts to herself. Then she started to think about Jeff. Did he cum inside her? “Shauna?”

“Yeah?”

“If you could choose between Jeff in high school and Adam now...” Shauna looked at her and sighed.

“It’s just different, Jax,” Jackie tilted her head, silently asking her to answer the question. “I just feel like... look, Jackie. He’s not you. Do you really want me to answer that question?”

“I won’t get mad. I’m over the Jeff stuff, okay? Please.”

Shauna took a deep breath and continued, “The sex with Jeff was good because it was the closest I would get to sex with you. I got off with Jeff every time, but I was... I was thinking about you. That being said, I hurt you by doing that, and I hated myself for it. I wouldn’t hurt you again.”

“But let’s say I wouldn’t get hurt. Purely a hypothetical.”

“I don’t know, Jax. I would never get with him now. But me in high school... how things were in high school... I don’t know.” Jackie looked up and saw how stressed Shauna looked. She decided to stop pushing.

“I’m sorry... for the interrogation and for getting drunk and kissing you. I don’t mean to stress you out.”

Shauna laughed, “It’s okay. You’ve been stressing me out my whole life, I don’t see it as a bad thing,” Jackie locked eyes with Shauna, trying to figure out if that was a joke or a dig, but Shauna smiled at her and the thought of it being malicious flew out the window, “Can I ask you something now?” Jackie nodded.

“This girl you’ve been hooking up with... Do you like it?” Jackie thought about how to answer the question. Of course she liked it, but it felt awful to talk about after Shauna just told her she had been having sex with a man that couldn’t make her cum.

Jackie nodded, “Yeah. I do.”

“And she...” Shauna was asking if she made Jackie cum. Charlie made Jackie cum over and over again, but that’s not exactly how she wanted to answer that question.

Jackie smiled a little bit. She really just didn’t understand why it was a question. Shouldn’t everybody cum every time? Maybe even more than once. “Yeah. She does.”

“Oh... okay. So are you guys like... dating or—”

“Oh, no. No. It’s not like that. We get drunk at the bar together. That’s the closest to a date we get.” Shauna nodded.

“So, it’s just like a casual thing? Hookups?”

“Yeah, it’s like... stress relief.” Shauna didn’t seem to believe that it meant so little, “She just got out of a long term relationship. I’m willing to bet they get back together. Kind of rooting for them, honestly. We’re just each other’s in between person, I think. Stress relief.”

“So you’re in between, then?” Jackie looked away. Who exactly was she in between? Shauna and... Shauna? It felt like she was never going to be over it enough to be in a relationship.

“I don’t know. Maybe dating just isn’t for me.” The girls sat in silence finishing their coffee. “She’s not you, Shauna.” Shauna’s head snapped up at her, but they didn’t say another word. After a few minutes, Shauna put the car in drive.

“Do you wanna go to the field? I still have a ball in my trunk.” Jackie hadn’t played soccer since Nationals. She was probably terrible now, but she nodded her head anyway. It was snowing, and Jackie felt bad for giving Shauna those shorts now, but she didn’t seem to mind the cold. The girls played to have fun, and it was genuinely the most fun she had in a long time.

Chapter 42

When Tai and Van drove Jackie back up to campus, they insisted that they had to have fucked at some point.

“You’re so full of shit, Taylor.” Tai said

“Yeah, I’m not buying it either. All that alone time and neither of you cracked?” Van asked.

Before Jackie could answer Tai chirped back in, “I mean you like... made out at the bar, and then when we woke up you two were over at her house.”

Van pointed at Tai, “It’s suspicious, Jax. Spill!”

“Seriously, we woke up early, got coffee, talked a little bit and played soccer. We didn’t do anything.”

“You guys slept in the same bed, all you do is fucking stare at each other...” Tai said

“We’re friends. We’re getting better at it. It’s a good thing, guys.”

“If I find out you’re lying again I’m gonna kill you.” Van said.

The rest of the ride they bickered and screamed to the music. Jackie was really going to miss them.

“So... Here’s what I was thinking. We come back here in like 3 weeks, then for spring break we all go visit Lot?” Van asked.

“I mean obviously my answer is yes, but you realize that I have like no extra space. You’d all be sleeping on the floor. I mean 7 of us in my little apartment probably wouldn’t be all that comfortable.”

“I was thinking just the three of us would come to visit. I liked our little night alone. I talked to Lottie and she said Nat would understand.” Van said it with so much excitement. Maybe they needed this. This would be fun.

“Oh, well then yeah. I could probably share Re’s and you guys could take my bed. Lot could take the couch. We could make that work.”

“Okay, deal. We’ll be back in three weeks, then.” Tai said. They dropped Jackie off and helped her get her stuff inside, but they had to leave pretty quick. They said hi to Renee and got back on the road. Jackie pretty much beelined for the phone. Jackie and Shauna might’ve been getting better at controlling their wants and needs, but that didn’t mean they weren’t there. She got Charlie on the phone before she even unpacked.

“Hey, Jack.” Of course she knew it was her. Who else would be calling the second they got back from break. Jackie laughed.

“Any chance you’ve got any pent up energy?”

“Always. I’ll come over tonight? 10?”

“Re will be working so yeah. See you then.” They hung up the phone and Jackie started to unpack. She was a mess. This all just felt like a mess.

When Charlie got there, Jackie barely let her through the door. She opened the door and pulled Charlie in by her waist. She kissed her aggressively, and pushed her against the door as she shut it. Jackie started kissing down her jaw and then her neck.

“Oh my god. Miss me, Jack?” Jackie grunted and laughed.

“Yeah... I missed this for sure.” Charlie smiled and pushed her away. With one hand on her chest, Charlie pushed Jackie into the bedroom. Jackie moaned as she got pushed down onto the bed. “God, just fuck me. Please.”

“You’re needy today... It’s kind of sexy.” Charlie watched as Jackie pulled her shirt over her head. She hadn’t been wearing a bra. Charlie’s jaw dropped and she tackled the girl onto the bed. Kissing her and sucking on her skin. Jackie pulled at her shorts, taking them off underneath the weight of Charlie’s body. She grabbed Charlie’s hand and pushed it down between her legs. Jackie gasped when she made contact. “God, you’re soaked...” She still wasn’t giving Jackie what she wanted. Her fingers were teasing her entrance, and Jackie was too worked up to resist her. She just had to let herself get turned into a squirming mess. “Oh, baby. You want it bad, huh?” Jackie nodded her head, being brought back to her fantasy in Shauna’s shower. She grabbed Charlie’s hand and pushed her fingers inside her. Charlie gasped.

Jackie moaned loudly, “Fuck, yes. Just fuck me like that. Don’t stop. Don’t— ever— stop —” Charlie grinned as she thrust her fingers in and out of her. She curled her fingers up and Jackie screamed. She came hard, her whole body shaking and trembling with the force of the orgasm. Charlie fucked her through it until one orgasm turned into two. She leaned down and started sucking gently on Jackie’s clit. Her tongue worked its way in circles around it and Jackie bucked her hips up into the girl’s face. She was sweating and tears were falling from her eyes. It was so stimulating that she felt like she couldn’t handle it. She couldn’t even speak, she just felt everything. She felt every move Charlie made, every touch of the girl’s tongue. It wasn’t long before she came a third time. It hadn’t even been 15 minutes. After the third, Charlie took her fingers out and ripped her own pants off, leaving her in nothing but a tank top. Jackie jumped at the sight of it, turning them around and pushing Charlie into the mattress. Jackie knelt at the end of the bed and pushed her tongue into the girl’s pussy. She held her down by putting pressure on her hips and Jackie ate like she was hungry. She tried to imagine it was Shauna she was eating out, and she mimicked the desperation she’d have if it was.

“Holy shit, Jack. Oh my fucking god,” Charlie moaned. Jackie pushed her tongue into her pussy, getting a better taste before moving up to her clit. She replaced her tongue with her fingers, fucking her with her fingers and her mouth. She could tell Charlie was cumming and she could maybe slow down, but it wasn’t about that. Jackie needed more. She fucked her harder and faster, and Charlie was screaming. She held Jackie’s head down, pulling her hair roughly and locking her legs behind Jackie’s neck. “Fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck.” Jackie felt Charlie’s whole body shake and finally her legs released. Her hand dragged Jackie’s face up by her hair. Charlie licked from her chin up to her lips, devouring Jackie’s face entirely.

Jackie moaned and Charlie went back between her legs, fucking her over and over again. When they finally collapsed, it was 2 in the morning. They had fucked for four hours. Jackie was out of breath and Charlie looked exhausted. After a few minutes, Charlie spoke up.

“Do you think you’d ever want to... go out to dinner?” Jackie looked at her.

“I didn’t think you’d be into that,” she said.

“Why not?”

“I kind of assumed you were holding out for Candace.”

Charlie sighed, “I can’t spend my whole life waiting patiently for her to figure it out,” she held Jackie’s face and kissed her before looking back up at her, “and you can’t either...” Jackie thought about it. A date would be fun. It would be good.

“I would love to take you to dinner.” Jackie smiled.

“Technically... I asked, so I’m taking you out to dinner.” Jackie laughed.

“Fine by me, baby.” The next morning, Charlie left fairly early. She kissed Jackie goodbye and promised to call her later. The next week, they had their date. It was nice, it was fine. It went better than any other attempt she had made, but it just still wasn’t right. Even so, she agreed to another. When she got home, Renee was waiting in the living room.

“So... how’d it go.” She took one look at Jackie’s face and laughed. “Shocker.”

“What? No, it was good. It was fine. We’re going out again next week.”

“You’re crazy, Jack.” Renee laughed again but refused to explain what was so funny. They went out on another date, and this time they made it clear that just because they were going out didn’t mean they were exclusive. Charlie said it was because she didn’t want to do anything too scary too fast, but Jackie knew it was just in case Candace called. She wasn’t complaining though, she had been stressed about the whole commitment thing. Really, their relationship hadn’t changed much. It was just a little bit more casual now, but they could both get what they needed while convincing themselves they were moving forward.

When the girls got there for their visit, they all sat down in the living room. It was 7 pm on a Friday, and they were trying to figure out what to do. “So, I was thinking we could just have a girls night in? Make some drinks here, watch a movie or something?” Jackie suggested. Tai and Van looked at each other.

“Or, you know. We could go out. Go see Re?” Van asked.

“I just offered drinks and a movie and Van Palmer is trying to convince me to go out instead?”

“Well... it would be fun, don’t you think?” Tai asked. Jackie was lost. She looked to Lottie for help.

“They want to meet Charlie. They’re idiots.” Lottie said.

“Oh my god, you guys. Seriously? You could’ve just asked. I’ll call her and invite her out.”

"Guess we gotta go get ready, then." Van stood up and dragged Tai into the bathroom. Gross. When Jackie called, Charlie jumped at the opportunity to meet her friends and agreed to meet them at the bar. When they got there, Jackie introduced everybody.

"No Shauna?" Charlie asked.

Lottie laughed, "Nope. Left her at home. She's a little scary in these situations. Probably for the best."

"Bummer, I was kind of excited to meet her." Charlie said with a laugh.

"She would not have been excited to meet you," Van said. "But we are, so it's all good."

"Is that why you guys insisted on a trip just the four of us?" Jackie asked. "So that you could meet Charlie without anybody getting violent?"

Tai and Van made eye contact and Lottie laughed. "Well you know... there was also the space thing, right?" Van asked Tai.

"Yeah. We were being nosey. Sue us," Tai said, laughing at Van's poor attempt at a cover up. The night went well. Everybody seemed to like Charlie and when they got back to Jackie's apartment the interrogation ensued.

"So... she's great. You're not into it?" Lottie asked.

"I don't know. She is great, but she's getting back with her ex. Just a matter of time."

"I mean... What if she doesn't though?" Van asked.

"I don't know. It's just not like that for me. I know it's probably fucked up of me but I just don't think I can do the whole relationship thing. It's just not meant to be." Jackie sighed and watched the other girls look around at each other.

"Whatever you say, Jax." Tai said. Jackie decided not to push it. She made up her bed for them and made a call to Shauna.

"Hey, it's Shauna."

"Hey. It's me."

"Oh, Jackie. I didn't think you'd be back so early."

"It's like 1 in the morning." Jackie laughed.

"That's early for you. How's the visit?"

"It's good. I miss you though."

"I miss you too, Jax. What'd you end up doing tonight?"

"Well apparently this whole thing was a trap. They wanted to meet Charlie, so we went to the bar."

"Oh, that's fun," Shauna said with fake enthusiasm. "How are things with her?"

"They're okay. We've gone out to dinner a few times. I don't know. I feel like I could get a call tomorrow that she got back with her ex. I don't think I'm really that into it."

“Well, I’d love to say it sucks to hear that but…” Shauna said.

“Yeah, I know.” Jackie laughed. “I should probably go, I was just missing you so I thought I’d call.”

“I’m glad you did, Jax. Have fun this weekend.”

“Bye, Shipman.” She hung up the phone and grabbed what she needed to get ready for bed. The rest of the weekend was fun, but too short. In a few weeks she’d be up at Lottie’s, and honestly she couldn’t wait.

Chapter 43

A few weeks later, Jackie hung up the phone on a particularly difficult conversation with Shauna pre-date. Adam was there in the room with Shauna when they talked, and Jackie felt like she could explode. She fucking hated him. He was nice, he was fine, but Jackie hated him. She got off the phone with Shauna and immediately dialed Charlie's number.

"Hey, it's Charlie."

"Hey, it's me."

"Oh, hey. I've actually been wanting to talk to you." Jackie wasn't really in the mood for talking.

"What's up?"

"Well Candace called..." Jackie took a deep breath, she knew where this was going.

"You're getting back together."

"Yeah. I'm really sorry, Jack."

"No, no. I'm happy for you. She came out?"

Charlie seemed ecstatic, "Yeah. She told everybody."

"That's great, Char."

"Look, Jackie. I really am sorry. I wasn't trying to hurt you with this. I really was trying to move on."

"Oh, I know. You're not hurting me. I'm okay. I think we both knew what this was, right?"

"Yeah... I guess we did." The line went silent for a minute, "Jackie, you can ignore me if I'm out of line, but you should call her."

"No... I can't. She's got a boyfriend."

"Let her decide what she wants, then. If she says no she says no, right? She could say yes."

"No, no. I'm glad you got your happy ending, but that doesn't mean that it happens for everybody. I'm really happy for you. Bye, Charlie."

"Bye, Jack." Jackie hung up the phone and took a deep breath. Fucking great. Not only did things seem to be getting more serious with Shauna and Adam, but her stress relief just ditched her too. In a fucked up way, Jackie wondered if asking her for goodbye sex would be too insensitive, but she knew it would be. They were probably already back together, and Jackie would probably fuck up somebody else's life in her attempt to tape hers back together.

The next few weeks Jackie regressed into making out with random girls and dancing and drinking until the bar closed at night. Renee had tried to talk to her about it, but Jackie didn't want to talk. She wanted to drink, and call Shauna, and then probably drink some more. She

had terrible sex with two different girls she wasn't attracted to at the bar and left in tears running back to her bedroom to call Shauna. She had put on a brave face and it didn't seem like Shauna had any clue what was going on, but she wasn't so sure about Van. Everytime she called, she asked all of these questions trying to get her to tell on herself. Jackie knew she was just worried, but she just wanted to ruin her life in peace. A few days before spring break, Re was at work and Jackie got a call. It was Van.

"Hey, Jax. What have you been up to?"

"Oh, you know... the usual."

"Right... what exactly is the usual?"

Jackie smiled, "Church service, volunteer work, donating money to homeless shelters, that kind of thing."

"Sure, sure. So now like the truth?"

Jackie laughed, "I know you're worried about me, but I haven't missed a shift at work. I haven't skipped a class. I go to the bar and probably make terrible decisions. I'll admit that, but then I wake up and do all the things I'm supposed to do the next day."

Van sighed, "What's the latest of your bad decisions?"

"I let some girl fuck me in the bathroom."

"Did you enjoy it at least?"

"Not even a little."

"Jackie, I'm worried. You're not happy."

"I will be. Don't be worried, please. It's fine."

"I'm excited to see you, but is this trip a good idea? We could bail, just come to you instead?"

"No. I'll be fine. Maybe seeing Shauna will fix me right up. Maybe it'll help."

"Okay. If you change your mind though, it's not a big deal. Seriously."

"Okay. Thanks. I gotta go. Bye." Jackie hung up the phone and ran her fingers through her hair. She spent the rest of the night at the bar. She drank until Renee refused to serve her, and then she found her way onto the dance floor to convince somebody to buy them for her for the rest of the night. Around 1 am she felt a hand grab her arm and drag her off the dance floor. She tried to rip it away, but when she looked up and saw bright red hair and a yellowjackets hoodie she knew she was fucked.

"Van? What are you doing here?"

"I called Re and asked if it would be okay if I came to visit for a few days before I drove you up to Brown. I couldn't get a hold of you so I just called the bar. I've been worried."

"Oh, I'm fine. I'm really glad you're here though! Hold on, I'll have Re get you a drink."

“Do you think we could actually just head to your place so I can set all my stuff down? My car’s running out front.”

“Yeah, for sure.” They said goodbye to Renee and Jackie got in Van’s car. “I’m surprised you came. It’s kinda last minute, is everything okay?”

“I don’t know, Jax. Is it?”

“Come on Van, seriously I’m fine.”

Van sighed, “Tai wanted to come with me but she has midterms tomorrow and Friday. We’re just gonna pick her up on the way to Brown Friday.”

“Okay. Makes sense.” They got to Jackie’s apartment and grabbed Van’s stuff, walking it up the stairs. When they got inside, Jackie tried to subtly clean the place up a bit. She knew that she was handling her shit with a bad coping mechanism, but it wasn’t because of the alcohol. She wasn’t addicted to it in the same way that Van’s mom was, or else she never would’ve stopped drinking it. That doesn’t make it right, but there was a difference, not that Van’s reaction would be any different. It’s not like her place was covered in empty bottles and cans on every surface, but at this point more than two empty cans on a table would’ve gotten a reaction out of Van, so Jackie was just trying to be proactive. If Van caught it, she didn’t mention anything.

“How have you been? Whatcha been up to?”

“Well, I’ve been working, learning how to cook. Tai has been pretty stressed so I don’t see a bunch of her. It’s a little lonely, I guess.”

“I’m sorry. You’re welcome to visit anytime you know.” Van nodded. She seemed sad.

“Look, it’s late, you’re pretty drunk, why don’t you take a shower while I get settled in a bit?”

“You sure? You’re good here?”

“Yeah, I’m good. You smell like you live at a bar.”

“Kinda do,” Jackie laughed. Van smiled at her. When Jackie got out of the shower she came back to a much cleaner version of her apartment. She couldn’t find Van so she walked into her bedroom. “Hey, you cleaned up. You didn’t have to do that.” Van was replacing Jackie’s bedsheets. The laundry on her floor had been picked up and her desk organized.

“I know. It’s good though to live in a clean space. Thought I could help out.”

“Okay, well thank you. I appreciate it.” Van nodded.

“I’m kind of exhausted. You cool if I just crash on the couch?”

“Oh, no. Come to bed. You don’t have to sleep on the couch. Plus, you spent so much time making it you might as well sleep in it.” Van caved and climbed in. They went to bed pretty much straight away. Jackie woke up for work, trying her best not to wake Van and got ready for the day. She followed her routine and got home around 5. The apartment smelled AMAZING. Van was cooking dinner.

“Honey I’m home! Are you cooking?”

“Yeah. Just baking some chicken.”

“In the oven?”

“Yeah, why? Is that okay?”

“Yeah of course... I just don’t think it’s ever been used.” Van laughed.

“Well it works like a charm. Dinner will be ready in like 20 minutes.”

“Well thank you, darling. I could get used to coming home to a home cooked meal. Tai is a lucky lady.”

“Tai usually just reheats stuff. She gets home pretty late most nights.”

“Oh, well still. I bet it’s great.”

“So... what’s our plan tonight?”

“Probably just head to the bar if that’s cool?”

“Yeah for sure, whatever you usually do, I’m on board.”

“Okay, cool.” Jackie sat down in the living room, doing some homework when her phone rang. It had to have been Shauna.

“Hey, Shipman, what’s up?” Van answered the phone before Jackie could get to it.

“Am I really that predictable?” Jackie asked.

“Figured assuming Shauna was on the other side wasn’t much of a gamble,” Van said as she handed the phone over.

“Was that Van?” Shauna said.

“Yeah she came up a few days early to hang out.”

“Oh, okay cool. What’ve you been up to today?”

“Just the usual. What about you?”

“Same. Got any plans tonight?”

Jackie looked at Van, who was definitely eavesdropping but pretending not to. “We’ll probably just watch a movie, hang around the house.” Van looked at Jackie.

“Oh, cool.”

“Sorry, Shauna. I gotta go. Talk later, yeah?” Jackie hung up the phone and looked at Van.

“You’re lying to Shauna now?”

“I just don’t want her to worry. She thinks every time I drink it’s because of her.”

“It kind of is though, right?”

“I would argue it’s because of the situation. It’s not Shauna’s fault, but she won’t see it that way.” They dropped it and ate dinner with Re, who was equally as surprised to see that the oven actually worked. They made it out to the bar and the second Jackie got some alcohol in

her she was letting some girl grope her on the dance floor. She felt the girl's hands on her ass and her thighs. It went on for a while before Van came to get her.

"Hey, honey. Maybe we should head home?" The girl let her go and walked away, probably thinking they were a couple and wanting no part in the drama.

"I'm having fun. Aren't you?"

"It doesn't really look like you're having fun, Jax."

"Well, I am."

Van pulled her to the corner of the bar where it was a little quieter. "You do not look like you're having fun."

"What do I look like, then?"

"You look drunk, and you look like you're torturing yourself," Jackie looked at her, unsure of what to say. This felt unfair. She was just letting off some steam, why should she have to hole herself up in her apartment and cry about things that have been over for a long time? "Let's go home, Jax."

"I don't want to go home. I want to stay in this bar, get drunk enough to forget how miserable my life has been and let strangers feel me up until I feel something."

"You are hurting yourself, Jackie. Not only the alcohol abuse, but you are putting yourself in dangerous situations. It's only a matter of time before something bad happens."

"I appreciate your concern, but I need you to let me make my own bad decisions."

Van gritted her teeth and walked back to the bar top to talk to Renee. Jackie found her way back on the dancefloor and continued her nightly activities. She knew she was a bitch, she knew that she wasn't upset with Van. She could never be that upset with Van. She shouldn't have taken it out on her, but that only made it worse. The more guilty she felt, the more she wanted another drink. At the end of the night, she found Van.

She was slurring her words when she opened her mouth to apologize. Van shushed her and just walked her home without another word. When they got through the door, Van sat her down on the couch.

"Jackie, I love you. I know that you're hurting right now, but you cannot live like this. It's not healthy."

Jackie felt the guilt hit her hard, "I'm sorry Van." She put up her finger to stop her and took a deep breath.

"I lost my entire family to this shit. My dad died because of a drunk driver and now with all the shit with my mom. You, Lot and Tai are the last family I have and I will not lose you too." Jackie felt like she sobered up instantly. She stood up and gave Van a hug.

"I'm sorry. I'm really sorry." She started to cry and Van hugged her back. She really didn't mean to hurt her friend, and she should've known how badly this would've affected her.

"It's not okay, but I love you anyway. I'm just glad that I came." Jackie nodded her head. She took a shower and got into bed next to a passed out Van. She was lucky to have friends

that loved her like this. She was gonna do better for them.

Chapter 44

The next morning they left for Brown. They packed, got ready and went to pick up Tai.

When they got there, Jackie mentally prepared herself to see Shauna. She was beyond excited, but she knew that restraint would be the key to the break. Tai had to be back for her internship so they only had four days at Shauna's place, but they knew it would be fun regardless of how short it might feel.

When she walked in, Shauna practically ran into her arms. She held her a lot longer than she probably should have, but she had missed her. It sucked to feel so distant from her. She made her rounds, saying hello to Lot and Nat too, before they all ushered her out of the door and into a small college town diner down the street. They ate an early dinner there and caught up. Jackie sat next to Shauna and tried not to be distracted. It didn't seem like Shauna was having the same problem, and that kind of broke Jackie's heart. She knew it was a good thing, but she missed being wanted by the girl. When they got back, Nat had to go to work and Tai and Van insisted on showering 'because they probably smelled' which was a terrible excuse, but one nobody felt like questioning. Lottie had to finish up an exam so for about an hour, it was just Jackie and Shauna.

"So... you gonna give me the tour or what?"

"Yeah of course. So much to see." Shauna moved to the front door and pointed around the relatively small, but nice apartment.

"Kitchen, laundry room, closet, bathroom."

"Very nice, very nice."

Shauna walked up to a closed door, "This is Lottie and Nat's room," Shauna walked down a small hallway to the right, "and this is mine," She pushed open the door and let Jackie in. It looked identical to her room at home. Books and notebooks everywhere. It was an organized mess. Jackie smiled at the familiar smells and vibes. It felt like home.

"This is exactly what I expected." Jackie looked at Shauna and saw her eyes soften. She smiled and Jackie's eyes hung on her lips and then her eyes. God she had missed this girl.

She walked around the room, looking at the pictures on the wall. There were a lot of her and Jackie, some of just Jackie, and some of Nat and Lottie too.

"Sorry. Looking at it all now it's like a shrine."

"No, no. Nothing wrong with being worshipped," Jackie joked. Shauna laughed and watched her make her way to her desk, looking at the open notebooks and her homework assignments. It was all so... Shauna.

"That you are, Jax. That you are." If that wasn't an ego boost then Jackie didn't know what was.

"I've missed you, Shipman."

Shauna walked over and slung her arm around Jackie's shoulders, "I missed you too." Jackie savored the touch and turned to her bed. She found a couple picture frames on her nightstand and thought back to the voicemail. 'I keep this picture of you on my nightstand...' Jackie smiled remembering it. She sat down on the bed and looked at it. There was a picture of her... but there was also a picture of Adam. Or, Jackie assumed it was him. She had never seen him before, but who else could it be? The picture was of Adam and Shauna at Nat's bar. He had her arms wrapped around her and she was leaning into him. Jackie felt sick. Shauna must have seen her face react and she came to sit down next to Jackie to see what she was looking at.

"Jax..."

"You failed to mention that you had two pictures on your nightstand..."

"I probably didn't at the time. I don't know."

"So it's kind of serious then I guess." Jackie couldn't meet Shauna's eyes.

"I don't know. We haven't like talked about it."

"You've been together for a couple months now, right?" Jackie's eyes were still trained on the floor.

"I guess so. Jackie, please don't be upset." Shauna put her hand on Jackie's thigh and Jackie jumped up at the touch.

"I'm sure Adam wouldn't be a fan of that, Shauna." Shauna hung her head and Jackie looked at the closet doors behind where she sat.

"I never meant to hurt you."

"You didn't hurt me. I'm your friend. Why would I be upset about you being with someone. Really, I'm happy for you." Jackie turned and started to walk out the door.

"Jackie, wait."

"Sorry, just need some air." Jackie walked out of the apartment and did a few laps around the block, stopping at a carryout on her last loop to grab some snacks and a soda. When she finally got back to their place, everybody was in the kitchen.

"Hey, Jax. Where ya been?" Van asked.

Jackie looked at Shauna, who looked worried and a little guilty, "Just ran out to get some snacks." She held up the bag and everybody took it for the whole story and continued. They spent the night in, and eventually Jackie got over herself. She was with Shauna, and that's what mattered. They started drinking and playing their usual games. Jackie made sure for Van's sake that the drinking was in moderation, but she didn't want to worry anybody else by not drinking at all. Van had bought a card game for them to play to change it up a little.

Van read the first card, "Who's most likely to become a millionaire?"

Everybody looked at Lottie. "Don't say me. My dad's money doesn't count," she said.

"Okay, well then I say Tai. That lawyer money's gotta be pretty good, right?" Jackie said. Everybody seemed to agree and handed the card over to her.

Lottie was next, “Who’s most likely to get away with murder?”

“Shauna, 100%. She’s a sneaky lil thing,” Tai said. Jackie laughed and nodded in agreement.

“I don’t know if that’s a good thing or a bad thing?” Shauna said, looking at Jackie.

“I don’t think it’s bad. The question isn’t who would kill somebody, it’s who would get away with it. Just means you’re a good secret keeper.” Jackie realized what she said and remembered the secrets Shauna used to keep. She looked away and luckily, nobody else seemed to catch why it was bad.

Shauna read the next card, “Who’s most likely to date two people at once.” Everybody looked around at each other and then their eyes slowly settled on Jackie.

“Oh just give me the damn card,” she joked, snatching it out of Shauna’s hand and lightening the mood a bit.

Jackie read the next one, “Who’s most likely to visit every continent?” Jackie didn’t even wait for the group’s synopsis before handing the card to Lottie. It was just too obvious.

The game went on for a while, and they had turned it into a drinking game. If you got a card you took a drink. Everybody was feeling pretty good, but especially Jackie. She had felt a little targeted by this game, but it was all in good fun. That is until Tai picked up the last card in the deck. “Who’s most likely to have the highest body count?”

“Well jeez, Jax you’re kind of getting attacked huh?” Jackie looked at Tai and then back at Shauna. She hadn’t exactly told her about the drunken hook ups. Tai didn’t seem to pick up on Jackie’s panic, so she continued, “Can anybody beat five?”

“I’ve only got two. Nat and that Tatum girl from high school,” Lottie said.

Shauna’s eyes never left Jackie’s. She looked pissed and Jackie was very aware of how sick it was that it turned her on. “I guess it’s mine.” Jackie looked away, grabbed the card from Tai and finished her drink.

“Feels like if you get the last card you should have to finish your drink, right?” Jackie laughed awkwardly and stood up to get herself another one. Shauna finished hers too and unfortunately followed Jackie into the kitchen. Jackie resisted the urge to look into her very frustrated eyes as she poured herself a drink.

“Five?” She was pissed. Her voice was stern and demanding, and Jackie felt her underwear get wet when she heard it. It was pathetic. She uncapped the vodka and poured herself a shot.

“Jackie, don’t do that.” Jackie knocked the shot back and turned to face her.

“Yes, five. You’ve fucked four people and I’ve fucked five people. What does it matter?”

A fire lit in Shauna’s eyes. She took a deep breath. “After all that shit you gave me... All the shit I had to take, and you’re keeping this from me?”

Jackie rolled her eyes. Why should she care? She was dating Adam. Why would that be noteworthy? “It wasn’t a big deal, Shauna. I wasn’t keeping it from you. It just wasn’t important,” Her eyebrows creased on her forehead.

“Not a big deal? Seriously? You were fucking livid when I didn’t tell you about Adam.”

“Going on dates is so much fucking different and you know that.” Jackie poured herself another shot.

“Who were they?” Jackie probably would’ve answered the question if she could remember.

“What does that matter? I don’t understand why you’re sitting here analyzing the number of people I’ve fucked.” Jackie could see her seething, her knuckles were white against the edge of the counter and she was taking deep breaths. Her biceps were threatening to tear the sleeves of her shirt. “I thought you were over it.”

Shauna’s head snapped up, “What did I do to make you think that I was ever fucking over it?”

“You got a fucking boyfriend, Shauna! You’re fucking over it. All I’m doing is trying to get there too.”

“Who was it? Was it Renee?”

“Jesus Christ. No, it wasn’t Renee.”

“Why won’t you just tell me, then?”

“Because I don’t remember! I don’t fucking know. I couldn’t pick them out of a goddamn lineup, Shauna.” Shauna glared at her.

“I cannot fucking believe how awful you made me feel about not talking to you. All so that you could turn around and do the same thing.”

“I never lied about it. You never asked.” Shauna’s jaw dropped and she took two steps closer to her, getting in her face.

Shauna whispered, trying not to scream, “Every fucking time we talked when you got back from the bar I asked how it was, what you did. You neglected to tell me. That’s lying. It’s lying in the same way I lied. This is the most hypocritical thing you’ve ever done, and that’s really fucking saying something.”

Jackie held eye contact, refusing to look down at her lips regardless how much she felt she needed to. “Sounds like you’ve got more to say, Shipman.” Jackie took a step closer and they were standing nose to nose. “Go ahead, say it. I’d hate to have to read it in your journal three months from now.” Shauna flinched, then she looked at her like she was about to spew actual poison from her mouth.

“Fuck off, Jackie. You want me to tell you I’m over it? You want me to say I don’t care about any of it anymore? Fine. I’m over it. I’m over fucking all of this.” Shauna’s eyes darted down to her lips and Jackie knew it was all a lie. She grinned, knowing she had won.

“Another fucking lie out of your mouth. Shocker.” Shauna looked like she wanted to reach out and grab Jackie by her throat, and Jackie kind of hoped she would. She loved pushing her buttons. She loved watching her muscles tense. Jackie grabbed her drink and walked out of the kitchen.

“Jackie. I’m so sorry. I didn’t know...” Tai said.

“It’s fine. Not really any of her business anymore anyway.” Lottie reached out and put a hand on her thigh, and Jackie offered her a little smile. Shauna walked back out and Jackie smiled at her, knowing it would probably just piss her off more. “Let’s play a different game, yeah?” They all agreed and moved on to truth or drink, which everybody kept relatively tame. When Nat got back, everybody started to get ready for bed. Jackie was starting to feel guilty about her conversation with Shauna, and she was waiting for her opportunity to go talk about it with her. When Van and Tai got comfortable on the couch, Jackie made her way to Shauna’s bedroom door and knocked.

“Come in, Jax.” Shauna was sitting on her bed, head in her hands. She looked stressed. Yeah, Jackie felt like shit.

“I’m sorry.” Shauna looked up at her and sighed.

“Why did you fuck them?” Shauna was not looking for de-escalation, apparently. Jackie shut the door and she walked further into the room, sitting in Shauna’s desk chair.

“To feel something. To feel anything.”

“I don’t understand why you wouldn’t tell me.”

“I don’t understand why you care so much.”

“It’s the double standard, Jackie!” Jackie rolled her eyes. Yes, Shauna was supposed to tell her when she got a boyfriend. If Jackie started seriously dating somebody she would’ve mentioned it. ‘It’s okay when you need to know every detail of my sex life. It’s okay when you ask me if my boyfriend makes me cum. It’s okay when you get pissed off at me for not being forthcoming, but when I get upset that you failed to mention two girls you apparently fucked like it was nothing I’m fucking crazy.’ Jackie rested her head in her hands. “I’m not allowed to fucking care at all, apparently. When all I fucking do is care.” Shauna stood up and started taking slow steps over to the desk, “All I fucking do is wonder who’s touching you in a bar. Wonder who’s kissing your neck, who’s leaving marks on your skin. I’m sitting out at dinner with Adam wondering what you were doing instead of answering my phone call an hour earlier. But you want to tell me that I’m over it.” They were face to face again, and this time Jackie was staring unapologetically at her lips. She wanted her, bad. Really, really bad. Jackie was scared to open her mouth to respond, unsure of what would come out when she did. Shauna had her completely blocked in against the desk, and it was entirely possible Jackie could’ve moaned right there with how sexually frustrated she was. “I will never be over it. I’m just going to have to live the rest of my life resisting every fucking instinct in my body telling me to fuck you on this desk.” Jackie gasped.

“Don’t.” Shauna was still pissed, but she was also confused. Jackie repeated herself. “Don’t resist it...” Shauna didn’t hesitate. Her mouth crashed into Jackie’s and her hands grabbed hard at her shorts. Shauna had them ripped off of her before Jackie could even take a breath. Before she knew it, Shauna’s fingers were pressed deep inside of her and as Jackie went to scream, Shauna’s hand covered her mouth. It was like she knew everything Jackie wanted to do before she did it. She was fucking her hard and violently. Jackie was in a fucking daze. It didn’t even feel real, how deep Shauna’s fingers were reaching into her. She was grunting and Jackie grabbed her arm, feeling her muscles flex with every movement.

“You have to be quiet okay?” Shauna asked.

Jackie nodded frantically and Shauna removed her hand, replacing it with her lips. She pushed her tongue deep into her mouth, wanting to taste every millimeter of it. She bit down hard on Jackie’s bottom lip, drawing a little blood. It took everything Jackie had in her not to scream, and instead she redirected her outburst to Shauna’s back, pulling her shirt up and tearing away at the skin. Shauna moaned and impossibly fucked her even harder. She looked up at Jackie’s lips again and Jackie noticed a crazed look in her eye. She reached out with her tongue and slowly licked at the cut she had left on her bottom lip. She sucked on it and Jackie’s eyes rolled back as she felt waves of an orgasm roll through her. Shauna didn’t stop. She picked her up and continued to fuck her in the air. Jackie grabbed pathetically at Shauna’s shirt, wanting it off so badly. Shauna laughed and slowed down so that Jackie could take it off and unclasp her bra. When her tits fell out of it Jackie moaned probably a little too loud, something Shauna didn’t seem too worried about anymore, because she moaned right back at the sound of it and started to bounce Jackie up and down on her fingers. She had to bite down hard on Shauna’s shoulder to quiet herself as she came again. Shauna removed her fingers and threw Jackie down on the bed, pulling her legs off the side of it so roughly that it hurt a little bit, not that Jackie wasn’t into it. She moaned at the feeling of being thrown around and Shauna grinned at her.

“Do you like it like this, baby?”

“Oh, fuck yes. Please just don’t stop.” Shauna knelt down and stuffed her face in between Jackie’s legs, eating her out like she’s never felt before. It was savage, desperate, and messy. She wanted so badly to win and to turn Shauna around, but she didn’t stand a chance. Jackie tried to sit up to pull her up and try to touch her, but without even looking up from Jackie’s pussy she reached out and pushed Jackie back down by her stomach. Jackie immediately came at the force of it. She shook violently and Shauna pushed her tongue inside of the girl, tasting every drop of her cum and not stopping until she came again. Jackie felt like she was going to scream. Shauna needed to stop if they were going to keep this anywhere near quiet.

“I’m— Shauna, Imgonnascream, Imgonnascream. You— fuck!” Shauna pulled herself away and growled at Jackie. Literally growled at her. Jackie tried to catch her breath but the desperation on Shauna’s face was not helping, and the look of her tits sitting so pretty in the soft light didn’t help either. “You’re so fucking hot,” Jackie said.

Shauna was immediately back between her thighs. She pushed two fingers inside her and pushed them deep and slow in and out. Jackie’s head pulled back into the mattress as she tried to keep her moans as silent as she could, but Shauna wasn’t a fan of it. She grabbed Jackie by the jaw and pulled her head back up to make eye contact with her. “If you move I stop. Watch.”

It wasn’t a question, it wasn’t a suggestion. It was a fucking demand. Shauna pulled her hand back and continued to fuck her. Jackie’s eyes immediately rolled back in her head. Shauna stopped fucking her and grabbed her again by the jaw, more forcefully this time. Jackie whined, “No, please. Don’t stop.” Shauna grinned and pushed her fingers back in, holding eye contact with Jackie as she licked and sucked on Jackie’s stomach, she ran her tongue all the way down to her clit and started to suck gently. Jackie held eye contact as her body shook. Shauna grabbed her hip with her free hand and held Jackie in place as she fucked her. She was trying so hard to listen. She was trying so hard to hold eye contact, but by her

fifth orgasm she couldn't control herself anymore. She was grunting and squirming and Shauna smiled.

"It's okay, baby girl. I won't stop. Just feel it." Jackie's head fell back and Shauna reached up to cover her mouth as she fucked her. She didn't stop until Jackie's body could barely move anymore. It had to have been at least an hour filled with nothing but orgasms. She was heavy breathing and trying not to pass out when Shauna crashed next to her on the bed. They were done? Jackie didn't even get a taste. Jackie took a deep breath and rolled over on top of her. She sucked on her tits, licking her nipples and biting them softly. Shauna was being way too loud, but Jackie didn't even care. She wanted to make Shauna feel good. She needed to make her cum more times that night than Adam had in the last few months they had been together. She needed it like it was a drug. She needed it more than she had ever needed anything before. She pulled Shauna's pants down and kissed her way from her ankles up to the sides of her knees, the insides of her thighs and then her hips. She licked across her stomach and then down to the spot just below her clit. Shauna was whimpering with every lick that fell just off target. Jackie smiled. "Say please." Shauna didn't even have to think about it.

"Please. Pleasepleaseplease. Jackie, please." Jackie locked her lips around Shauna's clit and she came within seconds. She really had been having bad sex. It was that easy for Jackie to get her off and Adam couldn't do it at all? Fuck that guy. She was determined to show Shauna how much better Jackie was at pleasing her. She ran her tongue down to her opening and sucked, listening to Shauna's moans as she did it. It was addicting to get her off like this. She was so into it. She reached down and gripped Jackie's hair, holding her down. Jackie moved back up to her clit and pushed a finger inside her, Shauna came again. Jackie pushed it gently in and out as her pussy pulsed on it. The feeling had Jackie wet all over again. She added another finger and sucked harder on her clit, starting to fuck her harder and faster with every second. She reached up with her other hand and grabbed hard at Shauna's tit, squeezing her nipple. Jackie looked up at her and decided she needed Shauna's nipple in her mouth right now. She didn't slow her hand down and moved up to grab her nipple in her mouth, sucking hard on it. Shauna moaned and came again.

Jackie removed her hand and her mouth and sat down on the bed. "I want you to ride my fingers. I want your tits in my face." Shauna got up and straddled Jackie's legs as she positioned her fingers in the right spot. Shauna grabbed the back of Jackie's neck and started to move up and down on her fingers. Jackie couldn't take her eyes off of the girl's open mouth as they fucked. Her lips were swollen and full. She bounced up and down, fucking herself on Jackie's fingers and Jackie attacked her neck. She sucked and bit it, moving down to her collarbones and her tits. The harder Shauna fucked herself on Jackie's fingers, the louder she got. When Shauna started to pick up the pace, Jackie kissed her hard, muting the volume of her orgasm. Shauna got off Jackie's lap with shaky legs and positioned herself back between Jackie's legs.

This went on until 7 am. They fucked like they were hungry non-stop for 5 straight hours, only taking breaks to drink water occasionally. It was like they couldn't get enough of each other. Every time one of them finished the other off, they switched positions and started all over again. Eventually, they passed out sprawled over each other, finally unable to go another round. Jackie woke up around 10 to Shauna's lips on her shoulder. When she saw Jackie had woken up, she bit into it gently. Jackie rolled over and grabbed her waist, burying her face

into her tits. Shauna laughed, but the second Jackie's mouth got close to them she couldn't resist the urge to slip a nipple into her mouth and suck on it. She was desperate to hear the moan that resulted from it. Shauna's nipples were so sensitive, and Jackie loved to see how easy it was to elicit a moan from the girl's lips. She loved being the one to cause it. Shauna rolled over on the bed, giving Jackie better access to her body. Jackie climbed back on top of her, kissing down her stomach until she disappeared under the covers. She was gentle, knowing that after last night they were both practically raw. She slowly licked at Shauna's pussy and was shocked at how wet she was already. It was a need, for both of them. Shauna rested her thighs on Jackie's shoulders and Jackie grabbed onto the skin of her hips as she rocked into Jackie's mouth over and over again until she came. It didn't take long. Jackie reappeared from the covers, "Sorry. I couldn't resist."

"Don't ever fucking apologize for that again." Jackie smiled and kissed her. "We should probably get up, baby. I'm sure everybody else is."

"We just went to bed," Jackie whined. Shauna kissed her forehead.

"C'mon. We can get coffee." Jackie groaned but the sight of a naked Shauna in front of her was enough to get her out of bed. Her back was destroyed. She didn't realize how hard she was scratching it last night. Jackie sat up and grabbed her from behind, wrapping her hands around Shauna's tits and kissing down the scratch marks. Shauna moaned at the feeling and Jackie was tempted to pull her back down to bed, but she was more worried that she had hurt her.

"I'm so sorry... I didn't realize. Did I hurt you?"

Shauna turned around grinning, "Only the good kind." She looked at her back in the mirror and her smile got bigger, "I kind of like them there."

"You're crazy," Jackie said with a laugh. They got ready together and got dressed together. It was almost like how it used to be, and Jackie was happy, until she looked back at Shauna's nightstand. Until she looked at the picture of her fucking boyfriend. She was sure Shauna would break up with him, right? The uncertainty was why she refused to bring it up. If her heart was gonna get broken, she might as well enjoy this time with Shauna. She spent the rest of the morning cherishing the forehead kisses and the lingering touches that they no longer had to shy away from.

Chapter 45

When they finally walked out of the bedroom, she ran face first into Van, who dragged her into the bathroom. Shauna just raised her eyebrows and watched her get taken away.

“Were you just waiting outside the door?”

“Well I heard the moaning end and thought maybe you’d be reappearing soon.” Jackie tried to contain her smile but she couldn’t and Van mirrored it. “What the fuck happened? What’s wrong with your lip?” Jackie looked in the mirror and noticed the small cut and the bruise that was starting to form around it. She blushed, remembering the way that Shauna licked the blood off of it. She was wet all over again.

Jackie laughed and she lowered her voice, “We fucked until like 7, slept for three hours and woke up and did it again.” Van’s jaw dropped. “I’m sorry if we kept you up. Were we really that loud?”

“It wasn’t like... constant, but every once in a while yeah it was definitely audible. I don’t think Lottie and Nat know.” Jackie nodded, kind of relieved that Nat didn’t overhear it. “So... what does this mean?”

“Oh, god. I don’t know. She still has a boyfriend.” Van rolled her eyes.

“Are they even exclusive?”

“I don’t know. Our conversations about him never really get very far... She’ll break up with him, right?”

“I don’t see how she could not,” Van said. Jackie looked at the wall. What if she didn’t? What if last night was just a result of them breaking the rules and slipping up and today they just reset. “Jackie, if the choice is between you and him, I don’t see a situation where she chooses him.” Jackie nodded and they walked back out of the bathroom together to a very uncomfortable silence between Tai and Shauna.

“Hey, guys... what’s up?” Jackie asked.

Tai looked at her, half way between a scowl and a smile. “Nothing, just talking.” Jackie looked at Van for help and she shrugged. “Nat and Lottie left a little while ago for breakfast.”

“Do you guys wanna get coffee with us?” Shauna asked.

“Yes! Coffee. Come on, Tai, we’re leaving,” Van said, not giving Tai the opportunity to say no. The four of them walked to the nearest coffee shop and all sat down together, more civilly than Jackie had expected. The energy between Tai and Shauna was definitely strange, but it dissipated with a little prompting from Van, which Jackie was thankful for. When they all got back to the apartment, Lottie had suggested they go out to Nat’s bar that night, which everybody was on board for. Shauna wasn’t making it obvious that their relationship had shifted much, but they held hands under the table, they let themselves be closer to each other and more touchy than they normally would be, but if Nat and Lottie didn’t already know, now

didn't seem like a good time to tell them. They hadn't even talked about it yet. They spent the day at a local farmer's market, where Jackie bought hand cut flowers for 'the apartment' but they were for Shauna. She wanted her to still see pieces of her when she went back to school the next day, and they were pretty. Felt wrong to let them sit at some stand all day. They got back and Jackie crashed hard on the couch and took a much needed nap. She woke up to the smell of pizza.

"Dinner's ready!" Nat yelled. Van laughed and patted Jackie's leg apologetically as she got up to grab a piece. Jackie fell back into the couch and Tai appeared with a plate of pizza and a beer for her. Jackie thanked her and looked around, Nat and Lottie were in the kitchen, Tai and Van were in the living room. There was no sign of Shauna.

"She's on the phone I think," Van said before Jackie could ask.

"I'll go get her," Nat said before disappearing into the hallway. Lottie looked at Jackie with her eyebrows raised and Jackie knew right away that she knew something.

Jackie squinted at her and whispered, "What?"

Lottie squinted right back. "I'm feeling a vibe. A new vibe. What happened? And what's wrong with your lip?"

Van laughed and Jackie looked over and shot a glare at the two of them. Tai shoved pizza in Van's mouth to shut her up and Jackie turned back to Lottie, "A lady doesn't kiss and tell."

"Oh and that's you? You're the lady?" Lottie joked, but then Nat came back so they all changed the topic.

"Nat are you working tonight?" Jackie asked.

"Yeah. I might get let off early though if it's slow."

"Oh, okay. That kinda sucks."

"I tried to get out of at least one night while y'all are here but my boss said no. He's a fucking dick." Shauna reappeared from her room, grabbed pizza and sat down next to Jackie. Jackie lifted her legs and Shauna grabbed them, setting them down on her lap. Lottie shot another look over at Jackie and she just shrugged. She was excited to go out with Shauna. She was excited to dance with her and kiss her and tease her without having to show restraint. They started the pregame when Nat left for work. They drank, danced, gossiped. It was fun. Shauna left for the bathroom and Van immediately ran over to where Jackie and Lottie were sitting.

"They fucked. All night. I heard it," Van said.

Lottie gasped and Jackie hit Van's shoulder, "You are such a little gossip!"

"If I had to hear it then I get to tell whoever I want." Jackie laughed.

"You guys are fucking ridiculous," Lottie said, referring to her and Shauna. They probably were, but it was complicated! It wasn't Jackie's fault. When Shauna came back in the room Lottie tsked at her and shunned her.

"What did I do?" Shauna said innocently.

“Van told on us,” Jackie said. Shauna laughed and just shrugged, not offering up any more information.

“Oh all of a sudden y’all can keep a secret?” Lottie said with a laugh.

“Shots anyone?” Shauna suggested, which got an eye roll in response from Lottie but everybody else jumped up and ran to the kitchen. They got to Nat’s at 9 to continue their pregame. Shauna and Jackie were drunk, leaning into each other, sitting too close, touching too much. They were having fun and they didn’t care who saw them. At 10 they walked over to the club next door. Shauna leaned into Jackie’s ear, probably a little unnecessarily to whisper, “I’m gonna get us some drinks. Meet me on the dance floor?” Jackie smiled at her and nodded, getting dragged as close as possible to the DJ by Van. Two songs had played and Shauna still wasn’t back, so Jackie went to check on her only to find her with fucking Adam. She was close to him, leaning in to talk. Their lips were too close and his eyes were glued to her tits. Jackie’s heart broke, but she really wanted to give Shauna the benefit of the doubt, so she marched up to them. Shauna’s face fell quickly.

“Hey, Jax. Look who I found!” She said it like Jackie was supposed to play along. Jackie squinted at her.

“I’m sorry... who is this?” Shauna blinked at her and Adam reached out to shake her hand.

“Hey, I’m Adam. It’s Jackie right?” Jackie nodded, never looking away from Shauna, who looked very nervous. She was really just gonna hang out with him all night. Wow.

“I didn’t know he was going out tonight, but when I walked up to the bar he was sitting right here.”

“Yeah, I didn’t realize you girls were gonna be out either. But now it’s cool cause I get to meet all of my girl’s friends.” My girl? Oh, Jackie was pissed. The worst part is, he wasn’t looking at her like she was a threat, which any rational partner would when looking at an ex. It was like he had no fucking clue. Jackie held eye contact with him for a minute before putting on that fake smile she wore for years.

“Yeah, it’s really cool. Good to meet you, Adam.” Shauna looked down, ashamed and Jackie pushed by her to order herself three shots and a vodka cran. She knocked the shots back and downed her drink before beelining for the bathroom. She splashed water on her face and tried to control her emotions. Shauna walked in behind her.

“Jackie, look. I didn’t know he was gonna be here, I promise. I’m sorry. Come on, please. It’s one night. Just one night, please.” Jackie looked at her in the mirror and then turned around.

“Does he know about me?” Shauna opened her mouth to speak, “Don’t lie to me, Shauna.” She looked down.

“No. He doesn’t know the whole truth about us.” Jackie nodded.

“Was it not real enough for you? Sex with me, a relationship with me doesn’t count? Is it because it’s with a woman?”

“No. Of course it was real. Of course it counts.” Shauna was getting frustrated and Jackie could tell, but she didn’t care.

“Does he know about Jeff?” Shauna sighed and rubbed at her forehead. He did. She thought her relationship with Jeff was more noteworthy than what they had.

“Jackie, please. It’s not like that. You know that I know it’s real. You know how much you mean to me. Why are you doing this? One night. That’s all I’m asking for.” Shauna begged her.

“Actually, I’m learning that I don’t know anything. I am such a fucking idiot. Jesus Christ. Don’t worry about your one night. I’ll give you the rest of them too. I’m sorry for making you waste your time on something so inconsequential. Won’t happen again.” She started to walk past her, and Shauna grabbed her arm.

“Stop. Jackie, just stop. Why are you doing this?” Jackie glared at her and pushed past her to walk out of the bathroom, now feeling painfully numb. Again. She ordered three more shots and took them without hesitating. She needed to be drunk. Now. She walked back out to the dance floor, expressionless and found Lottie.

“You good?” She yelled over the music. Jackie just put on a fake smile, despite the constant pain in her chest and started to dance. “Where’s Shauna?”

Jackie leaned in, “With her boyfriend.” She watched Lottie’s face fall and her eyes scan the bar to try to find them, and Jackie took the opportunity to escape from the situation. She needed to find somebody that didn’t know that her life was in shambles. She needed to find a distraction... fast, so she disappeared into the crowd and found a dark haired girl with dark eyes who looked at her like she was the most uncomplicated thing in the world. She walked up to her and started to dance as sensually as she could, moving her body to the music. The girl reciprocated and grabbed her hips. They moved together and Jackie wasted no time. She leaned in and kissed her gently. She felt the other girl smile through the kiss, but Jackie hated it. She hated every fucking second of it. She opened her eyes and found notShauna’s eyes looking at her and it made her sick, so she turned around to grind her ass into the girl. She felt her hands wrapped around her stomach. She heard the girl’s breathing in her ear and she bent her neck back for her to access. She took the hint and started to suck gently on her ear and her neck. Jackie opened her eyes to find Shauna, leaning against Adam at the bar taking a shot and just watching her. Jackie smiled at her. Shauna was in between his legs and he had his arm wrapped around her shoulder. She was so upset about having to wonder what Jackie was doing while she was out with Adam? Well now she won’t have to fucking wonder.

Jackie turned her and the girl around, looking at Shauna over her shoulder. She grabbed the girl’s hair and felt her arms wrap around to hold Jackie by the hips. Jackie wasn’t that into it, but she let her eyes roll back in her head for show and leaned down and kissed the girl again. When she opened her eyes, Shauna had ordered two more shots and was holding one in each hand. The girl grabbed Jackie’s ass and Jackie smiled at her, turning them around so that Shauna could get a good view of where her hands were. All of a sudden Van’s voice snapped Jackie out of whatever trance she had been in.

“I’m gonna go smoke. Wanna come with me?” Jackie shook her head, but Van insisted. “Come on, let’s get some air.” Jackie looked at her and realized she wasn’t really asking. She nodded and looked back up at Shauna, whose eyes had never left her. Van pulled her out of the bar and at the door, Jackie turned for one last glance at her girl— no, Adam’s girl. She stood up and it looked like she was following them out, but Van yanked Jackie away before

Shauna could catch up to them. She lit up in the alley and the smell of marijuana filled Jackie's nose. It smelled good so she reached out to take a hit. Van pulled it away.

"How many have you had?" She asked. Jackie was irritated. She was gonna pick now to worry about Jackie's alcohol consumption?

Jackie rolled her eyes, "He's fucking here, Van. He's here and she's acting like nothing happened."

"Doesn't mean you need to be crossed when you're probably like 8 shots deep right now."

"I think it's 6." Van rolled her eyes and took a long hit.

"I'm sorry, Jax. She's a fucking dick. I don't understand her and it's pretty fucking clear that I never will, but don't let her be the reason you fly off the fucking handle. Please."

"I'm not flying off of anything."

"You need to chill out. I get that this is awful. If you want to leave right now we will go with you, but don't make a bad decision you'll regret tomorrow. Please."

"I regret everything else. Why not tonight too?" Jackie joked. Van didn't laugh, instead she just stared at Jackie as she took another hit. "I'll be fine. Promise."

Van and Jackie walked back in the bar and Jackie's eyes immediately found Shauna turned around now, chest to chest with Adam. Her hands were tangled in his hair and he was smiling into her neck. Jackie felt sick. She walked up to Shauna with Van trailing her. "Jackie, hey. Let's just leave. We can just leave right now." Jackie ignored her.

"What the fuck are you doing?" Jackie demanded. Shauna turned around, faking confusion.

"What do you mean?" She asked. Adam looked between the girls, obviously confused and laughed awkwardly.

"We come all this way to visit you and you can't pull yourself away long enough to spend any time with us?"

"You looked like you were doing just fine on your own." Shauna's eyes were shooting daggers at her.

"Hey, baby. Why don't you just go hang out with your friends for a bit? I'll be here when you're ready to go home," Adam tried to diffuse the situation but all it did was piss Jackie off more. She really felt nauseous now. Ready to go home? Like he just assumed they'd be fucking tonight. They probably would be. Jackie looked at Shauna and her eyes flickered to Jackie's bruised lip. She saw her eyes light up and Jackie's heart broke. She wanted her. Shauna wanted her, but Jackie just wouldn't be enough for her. She was a girl. That had to have been it. Adam was real and she wasn't. Shauna looked like she was going to follow her out, but she didn't. She chose him, again, for the second time tonight.

Van grabbed her arm gently and tried to pull her away. Jackie brushed her off, "Just forget it." Jackie turned to Van. "I gotta pee. Alone." Van held her hands up and shot a look full of hatred in Shauna's direction. Jackie stormed off to the bathroom and collapsed the second she got in a stall. She fell to her knees and immediately threw up. She remembered how Shauna

kissed her neck that night, how long ago that was and how little progress she had made. She stood up and drank water from the sink, rinsing out her mouth before spitting it back up. The door swung open and Shauna stormed in.

“What the fuck are you doing.” Like Jackie was in the wrong.

“What am I doing? What the fuck are YOU doing?”

“Apparently watching you fuck somebody on the goddamn dance floor all night.”

“You’re so fucking dramatic Shauna nobody was fucking. Even if we were... I’m confused what business of yours that would be.”

“I fucking love you, Jackie. I love you. That’s why it’s my business.”

“You love me?” Jackie laughed, “Bullshit. It actually blows my mind how little I have meant to you. Over and over again I’m somehow confused when you do something to hurt me. Maybe that’s just what you do, Shauna.”

“I hurt you? I only had a boyfriend because you made it very clear that you didn’t want me. Then when he fucking exists and lives in the same town as me you let some other bitch suck on your neck and grab your ass right in front of me. You don’t think that’s hurtful?” Jackie looked at her, trying not to get aroused at the way she was yelling at her. ‘She left a fucking hickey on your neck. I can see it already.’ Shauna took three steps and she was on her, with her hand pressed against the spot notShauna had been sucking. “You let her leave a mark on you, and you made me watch it.” Shauna’s hand on her neck had Jackie embarrassingly aroused. She wanted more. She was so angry, but so was Shauna... and Shauna was hot when she was angry. Jackie watched Shauna’s eyes move from the hickey to her eyes, then down to her lips.

“I didn’t make you do shit. You chose to sit there with your boyfriend and stare at me. You could’ve come and taken me away from her. You could’ve kissed me right in front of her and let everybody know I was yours, but you didn’t want fucking Adam to know,” Jackie said it with malice. She wanted to piss Shauna off. Those dark brown eyes moved back and forth from her lips to her neck, growing angrier with every second before she leaned in and kissed Jackie, pulling her in by her neck. Jackie moaned into the kiss and attacked her with the same breathy neediness Shauna had until she came to her senses. They were making out in the bathroom so that her boyfriend didn’t see. They were kissing now because Shauna didn’t want to choose her over him. She pushed Shauna away hard enough for the girl to release her neck. “Fuck, Shauna. No. You picked him. You got a fucking boyfriend and decided that you’d rather be with him tonight than me. You don’t get to fucking kiss me like that.”

“You can’t be mad that I got with somebody, Jackie! You told me over and over again you didn’t want a relationship. What am I supposed to do, just wait and hope you change your mind for the rest of my life? You wanted to be friends!” Shauna was waving her hands as she talked, and Jackie could see that she was truly frustrated, but Jackie was hurt. Her eyes were burning and her head was spinning. She just wanted to cry and throw up again. She felt pathetic, loving the fact that Shauna gave her a crumb of affection once she was out of Adam’s eyesight. This was fucking ridiculous.

“Well I was fucking wrong. I can’t be your friend, and right now I don’t think I can be your anything. Why don’t you just take your boyfriend home and pray that maybe this time

he can actually make you cum. Hopefully it was all fucking worth it.” Shauna stood there a step away from Jackie, obviously hurt but masking it with anger. She searched Jackie’s eyes, probably waiting for her to take any of it back. But she had no intention of that. She was done. She couldn’t keep doing this. She felt fucking stupid. Shauna turned on her heel and walked out of the bathroom. Jackie took a deep breath and splashed some water on her face. A wave of nausea hit her and she threw up once more, washing out her mouth and trying to recollect herself before following the girl out. She couldn’t stop herself from scanning the bar for Shauna, and found her dragging a smiling Adam out of the bar. She was actually listening. She was going to go back and fuck Adam in the same fucking bed they shared last night. Jackie ordered another shot against Van’s advice and found notShauna again. She was dancing with somebody else, but Jackie didn’t care. She grabbed her and kissed her hard. She wrapped her hands around the girl’s waist and felt her hands on her ass. NotShauna was moaning into her mouth and her hands were grabbing at Jackie but not in the way Jackie wanted. She wasn’t fucking doing it right. As the bar turned the lights on notShauna whispered an invite back to her place.

“I have to tell my friends. Meet me out front.” She nodded and Jackie searched for red hair in the crowd. She found Van, Tai and Lottie all seemingly looking for her too.

“Jackie! Hey, do you know where Shauna went?” Lottie asked.

“She left. With Adam. They’re at the apartment already.” Lottie and Van looked at each other and Tai looked at Jackie with genuine concern. It had been a while since Jackie had seen that look on her face, and she didn’t like it. She was fine. She didn’t care what Shauna was doing. Fuck Shauna.

“Jax...” Tai said.

Jackie shook her head, “I’m actually going back to that girl’s apartment tonight. You guys go, I’ll see you in the morning.”

Van shook her head, “This feels like a bad idea, babe. Why don’t you just come home with us? We can have a little sleepover in the living room. It’ll be fun.” Jackie thought about it, but the thought of listening to Shauna and Adam fuck or watching him walk out of her bedroom in the morning made her somewhere between homicidal and suicidal, so she shook her head again.

“No. I’m good.”

Jackie turned to walk toward the entrance and Tai grabbed her arm, “Hey. You don’t even know this girl. You don’t want to do this.”

“The fuck I don’t. I’m gonna be fine.” Jackie looked at Van and she touched Tai’s arm.

“Let her make her own bad decisions, babe. We’ll see her tomorrow.” Tai looked at her shocked and rolled her eyes, letting go of Jackie’s arm. Lottie didn’t say anything but she was obviously upset about the whole situation. Jackie felt bad, knowing that she felt in the middle of it all, but she felt worse about the idea of being in the same apartment as Shauna right now. Jackie gave Lot a soft smile and headed out front to find notShauna.

They got back to her apartment and all Jackie wanted was to be dominated. She wanted this girl to inhale Jackie the same way Shauna did. She wanted to be bit and thrown and

apparently choked, but this girl didn't do any of it. She kissed Jackie messily, but also gently. She didn't rip her clothes off her, she didn't push her up against a desk or pin her down. As much as Jackie tried, she couldn't get the vibe to change into what she wanted. The girl ate her out for 5 minutes and Jackie was bored. She felt like she could cry. She wondered if Shauna was making Adam cum at the same time as Jackie was having this boring, unsatisfying sex. She wondered if the scratches on her back were still visible. She wondered what Shauna was like with a man. She's such a fucking control freak it was hard to imagine her in typical heterosexual sex. Jackie realized that she had been daydreaming during the act and she looked down to find notShauna still between her legs. Jackie pushed her back and started to fuck her with her fingers, hitting that spot that Shauna always loved. She let the girl suck and bite on her neck as she came, trying to ignore how even her bites were fucking gentle. Jackie needed it to fucking hurt. She needed it badly. NotShauna returned between her thighs and started licking gently at her clit. Jackie sighed, realizing that she wasn't going to get there. She just couldn't get into this. NotShauna just wasn't Shauna. Jackie started to fake moan, making it seem like she was getting closer to an orgasm and after a few minutes, she faked the whole thing. It's a good thing she had all that time with Jeff to practice it. NotShauna collapsed in the bed next to her and Jackie stared at the ceiling while she snored.

She felt tears start to well up in her eyes and drop down the sides of her cheeks. She tried to sleep, but all she could think about was Shauna fucking Adam. She was so happy that morning, all for Shauna to rip out her heart and fucking stomp on it. She just felt so fucking stupid. She thought she finally had what she wanted, she thought they were going to be happy. She felt like she was back in high school all over again, Shauna choosing to fuck Jeff right after she had gotten done with the best sex of Jackie's life. Now she did the same thing with Adam. Around 6 am, Jackie decided to just make a break for it. If she had to sleep in Van's car, so be it. She couldn't just cry in notShauna's bed all morning. She grabbed her jeans and tank top she wore out and changed back into them in the bathroom, pulling her hair up and wiping away whatever makeup was left on her face.

Jackie walked the three blocks back to Shauna's apartment and at the entrance ran into Tai, who was dressed for her morning run.

"Do you never sleep?" Jackie asked, trying to ignore the things that she knew Tai would want to talk about.

"Doesn't look like you did." Jackie felt her eyes well back up and dropped her head to look at her feet so Tai couldn't see her crying. It was embarrassing how fucking fragile she felt. Tai sighed and took off her sweatshirt.

She offered it to Jackie and said, "Come on. Let's go for a walk." Jackie wiped her eyes, put on the sweatshirt and followed Tai.

Chapter 46

“What the fuck happened last night?” Tai asked.

Jackie took a deep breath, “I don’t know if I’m just fucking stupid or what, but I thought we were like, gonna be together. Like I was genuinely fucking happy and when I saw that she was with Adam it all came like crumbling down.”

Tai nodded, “He is her boyfriend, Jax.”

“He didn’t know anything about me. It was like I was insignificant. I was nothing to her.”

“Everybody who has fully functional eyes knows you are not insignificant to that girl.”

“She told him about Jeff! Adam thinks that Jeff had a more significant relationship with Shauna than I did. I don’t know, Tai. I’m just not gonna be a guy. I don’t get if she just didn’t take it seriously because of that... I don’t know.”

“Yeah, I don’t get that either.”

“It’s the most significant thing that has ever happened in my life but it’s not worth mentioning to her new boyfriend? I felt stupid. I felt so awful and embarrassed so I found somebody to distract myself. She kissed my neck and I guess left a mark,”

“Oh yeah I clocked that. You have a few of them.” Tai laughed at her.

“Well Shauna clocked it too. She cornered me in the bathroom asking why I was fucking some girl on the dance floor right in front of her. I told her she was being dramatic and she like grabbed my throat to point out the hickey—” Tai’s head snapped and she stopped in her tracks. It looked like she was about to go find Shauna and get in a fight that she would probably lose. Jackie put her hand on Tai’s arm. “It wasn’t like that— it was...” Jackie laughed a little, embarrassed to be talking about their sex life like this.

“Oh, god. I should’ve known y’all would be into some freaky shit.” Tai shook her head. “I still don’t like her putting her hands on you in anger, though. I don’t fuck with that.”

“She wasn’t going to hurt me, Tai. She actually kissed me... until I realized how stupid I was. She kissed me in the bathroom once she was out of Adam’s eyesight. She didn’t just want me. She wanted me when it was convenient. I pushed her away and told her we were never going to be friends, and that I wanted nothing to do with her.”

Tai raised her eyebrows but refused to look up at Jackie, seemingly shocked that all that was said. “Did you mean it?”

“I think so. I thought it would help me move on, but it hasn’t. I’m more of a mess now than I was before we reconnected. I can’t keep doing this to myself,” Tai nodded and didn’t say anything, so Jackie asked the question she had been sitting on, “Were they there last night?”

Tai looked up at her with worry. She was probably unsure of how Jackie would react to her response. "I think so. I think he spent the night." Jackie nodded, pursing her lips and trying not to break down.

"Did you hear them..." Tai wouldn't meet her eyes and that felt as good as a yes to Jackie. She nodded, not making Tai answer the question.

"What's your plan, Jax?"

Jackie sighed, "I don't know. I've tried to date, I've tried hookups, I've tried. I really have, but none of it has come even close to even making eye contact with Shauna. She is the fucking love of my life, and all she can figure out how to do is hurt me."

"Do you think you need to have another conversation? Like a clean break?"

"I think I made it pretty clear... I don't know. I cannot look at her right now. I just can't."

"I mean if this was going to happen y'all picked the right time for it. Van's packing up our stuff now. We were planning on heading out as soon as you got back." Jackie nodded, remembering the clothes Jackie had left on Shauna's floor that she probably would never get back. Did Adam see them last night? Did he question it?

"Do you think she'll come out of her room?"

"I don't know, Jax. You'd know better than me."

"I don't think I really know her at all." Jackie looked at her shoes as they turned around to head back to the apartment. Tai wrapped her arm around Jackie's shoulder and held her the whole way back.

"Let's go home." Jackie nodded against Tai's shoulder and they walked back to Lottie's together. Jackie waited in the car and Lottie came downstairs with Van and Tai to say goodbye. Lottie apologized on Shauna's behalf, which Jackie told her was unnecessary. The drive felt like it took forever, Jackie's heart hurt more and more every mile further from Shauna she got. She was so upset and angry and frustrated, but she was more hurt than any of that. When they got to Rutgers, Jackie grabbed her stuff and immediately went to her bedroom, ignoring Renee's questioning on her way in and saying quick goodbyes to Tai and Van. She assumed that they'd just catch Re up on their way out, but an hour later Van and Renee came into her room together. Van sat at her desk and Renee sat down on the bed. Jackie sat up.

"What are you still doing here?" Jackie asked Van, confused.

"I'm gonna stay for a little while. I hope you're cool with that." Jackie nodded.

"Of course I'm cool with that, I just don't want you to put your life on hold for me."

"Jackie I slept at your house for like a whole summer when you were apparently trying to hook up every night. You did it for me." Jackie smiled at first and she really did try to hold it, but it fell quickly upon the remembrance of Shauna. She fucking missed her and she hated herself for it. It had been a day since she had treated her like shit. Why would she miss her?

Renee put a hand on her thigh, "Obviously I wasn't there, but it sounds like it was pretty bad. Do you wanna talk about it?" Jackie shook her head. She didn't. She wanted to sleep for

the rest of her life. She wanted to know if Shauna would've said goodbye to her if she had gone inside. She wanted to know if Adam was still there. She wanted to know what Shauna was thinking, but she knew she couldn't ask. She wasn't that pathetic. Jackie skipped the first week of work and classes. She struggled to get out of bed or to shower. She probably wouldn't have eaten if Van hadn't cooked for her. Van and Renee tried a few times to get her out of her room, but she couldn't even fathom it. At midnight on that following Sunday, she got a call. It had been a week and a half, and she knew it had to be Shauna. She thought about answering, but just sat up in bed to stare at the ringing phone. Van walked cautiously in her room and watched Jackie watch the phone. Then, Shauna's hesitant voice started to play out.

"Are we— are we just not going to ever talk again? I know that... I know you were mad..." it sounded like she was lost. She had no idea what to say, but decided to just call anyway. Did she seriously expect Jackie to answer the phone? Jackie looked at Van, who looked worried. "We can't just never fucking speak again, Jackie." Then, she hung up. Jackie laughed.

"Feels like we actually can just never fucking speak again." Van smiled.

"What if we went and visited Re?" Van suggested.

Jackie shook her head, "I don't feel like going out."

"It's a Sunday, I'm sure you could just take a quick shower... put on some jeans? It won't be busy." Jackie thought about it. Maybe it was time?

"I'll take a shower and let you know?" Van beamed at her, like that was the biggest accomplishment Jackie had ever made. Jackie got in the shower for the first time in over a week and left it feeling better than she thought she would. She decided that maybe it would be good to get out. When she walked in, Renee practically screamed.

"Jack! What's up? I didn't expect to see you." Renee grabbed a bottle of vodka to make her drink, but after receiving a glare from Van switched to the soda machine.

"She got a phone call..." Van said.

Jackie took a drink of her diet coke and Renee gasped, "You talked to her?"

"No. I'm never talking to her again. She left a voicemail, though. Basically just 'you're going to talk to me.'" Jackie laughed and Renee went from shock to concern.

"So... do we ever get to know what happened?" Renee asked.

"I figured Tai would just tell you guys," Jackie said, taking another sip.

"Yeah well unfortunately she's not much of a gossip when it comes to you," Van said. "But I did tell Re that you guys fucked."

"That's kind of sweet actually..." Jackie said.

"So... what happened?" Renee asked again.

"She doesn't see me as a real relationship. She told Adam about fucking Jeff but never mentioned me. She ignored me at the bar all night to hang out with him and kissed me in the bathroom after yelling at me for dancing with somebody else. Just treated me like some dirty

secret, I don't know. It fucking sucked. I told her we weren't ever going to be friends and that I wanted nothing to do with her..." she trailed off like there was more, because there was more. She had failed to mention it to Tai, but Re and Van always seemed like they wanted more details than she did when it came to talking about sex, so it felt more welcomed here.

Van squinted her eyes, "There's more. Spill."

Jackie smiled, "Well... I told her to fuck off and go fuck her boyfriend. I told her to just pray that he can make her cum." Van's jaw dropped and Renee started cracking up.

"You said that to her?" Re asked.

"Yeah it was kind of the only positive to come out of the whole conversation." Jackie laughed with them and it felt kind of good, but by the time she finished her diet coke her social battery was pretty much dead. She and Van walked back to her apartment in silence and Jackie pretty much just went back to bed. The next few days, Jackie had returned to her mostly normal self. She didn't close out the bar, she didn't drink at all, but she was back to work and classes, and Van decided that maybe she should get home. Jackie thanked her for taking care of her and asked her to say hi to Tai. Renee nearly cried when Van left, apparently they had really bonded, or maybe Re had just bonded with the home cooked meals. That night, Shauna called again and again, Jackie just watched the phone ring.

"I'm sorry." She spit the words out like she hated that she was saying them. "I guess... I don't know. I guess I should've told him to leave. I should've done something. Please just call me back." Yeah, no thank you. She guesses she should've done something different? She doesn't know? Fuck that. She can't even fucking apologize. Jackie rolled her eyes and went back to her homework.

Three days later she left another one, "I'm tired, Jackie. I don't know what I'm supposed to be apologizing for. I don't know if you're upset we had sex or if you're upset about the bar. I just... I wish it would've gone differently. I wish we could've talked before you left. I know you didn't mean it, Jax. Please talk to me." She didn't know? What the fuck? The issue wasn't just the bar. The issue wasn't just the fucking. The issue was that since she had started dating Adam, she admitted essentially that her relationship with Jackie was less real and less important than her relationship with Jeff. Jackie didn't even fucking think about Jeff anymore, and he was HER boyfriend. But Shauna could mention him to Adam? And then on top of it all, she reassured that assumption by spending all night with him and just watching Jackie dance with somebody else. If the roles were reversed, Jackie could've never just watched that. Even in high school, if Shauna started getting too close to somebody she found some excuse to need her attention. Now after everything, Shauna would rather watch Jackie with somebody else than hurt her boyfriend's feelings.

That weekend, Shauna's voice woke her up at 4 am. "Answer the phone, Jackie. Please. I'm just trying to talk to you. You can't go the rest of your life ignoring me, please. I just need a minute. Just let me talk to you for one minute. Please." She was practically whining it into the phone, and Jackie's heart splintered a little further. She was hurting, but so was Jackie. She tried to go back to sleep, and when she couldn't she went for a run instead. It worked a little better than it had the last time she tried, and she had enough time in the morning to make herself breakfast. She was so proud of herself that she called Van to brag about the accomplishment.

“Wow! Proud of you, Jax. It sounds like you’re doing well.”

“Yeah, I feel okay.”

“Just okay? Has she who shall not be named called again?”

“A couple times, yeah.”

“You still not answering?”

“No. I just... I don’t even know what I would say. She picked. I don’t know. I need to be over it.”

Van chuckled a little, “Yeah, sure.” Jackie rolled her eyes.

“I’m not answering. I don’t know what she could possibly say to get me to answer.” Jackie ate her breakfast and went to work and class. She met Re at the bar for a few hours and when she got back she had another voicemail.

“Hey. I don’t— I don’t really know what to do here. I miss you. I miss talking to you everyday. I um... I submitted that short story I’ve been writing. I know you don’t care... I’m sorry, I just can’t handle not telling you. I can’t handle not calling to update you... I really can’t handle not knowing how you are. My professor really liked it. Said it felt authentic and raw. I’m pretty proud of it, I don’t know... Nat had to kick somebody out of the bar last night. It was terrifying, actually,” Shauna laughed. Jackie stood at the phone, frozen entirely. She couldn’t tell what she was feeling. Annoyance, rage, or sadness, but she really just wanted to make it stop. Shauna was making her feel like shit, again. She wanted to delete the voicemail and never hear her voice again, but she couldn’t move. All she could do was listen to her best friend talk about her day. “Okay... Well, I guess I’m gonna go. I really wish you’d call. Bye.” Jackie was snapped out of it by the absence of Shauna’s voice. She took a shower and went to bed without giving it another thought.

A few days went by before Jackie got another call, and she hated that she was waiting on it. She called late again, at 3 am and she was very obviously drunk, slurring her words, “Fuck baby, I miss you. I miss you more than I’ve ever felt anything before. I will do anything. I know I fucked this up. I fucked us up again. I let you down, and I know that. I think I really truly hate myself for it. Not just the recent stuff either...” Shauna broke down. She was in tears, ‘I hate everything I’ve ever done. I just... every day I wish I was a different person. I wish I just did what I should do, but I’m fucked up, Jackie. I just wish we could talk about it. Please. Please baby, just tell me what to do and I will do it.’ Every word she spoke was in between sobs, and it broke Jackie’s heart to listen to it. Shauna didn’t cry like that. She never had been one to express sadness like at all. Usually it was angry outbursts or something hurtful that she said impulsively, it was almost never tears. It actually killed Jackie to hear how upset she was, but at the same time, Jackie wanted her to choose her without having to be told. She didn’t want to have to tell her to break up with Adam. If she loved him then Jackie wanted her to have him, and if it wasn’t right and Shauna wanted to figure things out with Jackie then honestly, she should’ve done it weeks ago at that bar. “I’ll break up with him. I’ll tell him to never speak to me again. I’ll fucking leave Brown and transfer to Rutgers. I need you in my life. I don’t understand, baby. I am suffering, I am miserable, please. I’m so miserable that I think I’ve paid for whatever I owe you. Just talk to me. Even if it’s the last time. Please just let me say sorry.” The line went dead and Jackie felt it in her stomach. She

hated this. She hated that she had no desire to return the call. She hated that Shauna needed to be told how to choose her and when. It wasn't fucking fair.

Jackie didn't go back to sleep all night. She tossed and turned until 5, went for a run, made breakfast and did everything on her usual 'Shauna called at 3 am' to do list. None of it worked. The sound of her sobs and her pain stuck with her, even if it was due to her own actions. Jackie knew that she owed it to herself to not continue reinserting herself into these situations, but she just wanted Shauna to stop killing herself over it. As much anger and hurt she felt, she never wanted Shauna to feel this awful.

Chapter 47

Shauna called the next night at the same time. "I'm so sorry. I didn't think that you'd be done with me like this. I didn't know that it would hurt you the way it did. I need you to answer the phone. I have so much I want to say to you... I have so much I need to understand. I need you, Jackie. Please, answer your phone. I feel like I'm going crazy and I'm driving myself to complete and utter misery just for you to still not be here. Answer your phone, Jax. I know you can hear me. You have to at least be listening, right? You can't be done. We can't be done. Am I too late, Jax? Did you find somebody that doesn't hurt you like I do? Did you find somebody to make you happy? I won't be mad. I can't be mad. Just... please. I know you want nothing to do with me, and I know you said you don't want to be friends, but if there's somebody else that treats you better than I do, I can be your friend. I can do that. I'll do anything. I will do anything for you. Please. I love you so much, Jackie." Jackie had had enough. She needed to do something, because these calls were as hurtful as they were eagerly awaited. Finally, she picked up the phone.

"We can't be friends. I cannot be your friend, Shauna. We have never been anything as simple as friends, as much as you'd like to convince yourself and Adam otherwise."

Shauna actually audibly gasped into the phone. "Jac—" Jackie hung up as fast as she could. She got her point across, and she didn't need Shauna's opinion on it. Again, Jackie stuck to her routine. She got out of her room as fast as she could to ignore the follow up call, and for the most part it kept her on task. She didn't call back, she didn't skip class. She wasn't waiting by her phone. She was... okay. Jackie told Renee the basics, but really every message said the same thing. There wasn't a bunch to say about it. Nothing had changed for Jackie, other than her feelings of guilt that had bubbled up from Shauna's torturing herself. Part of her was just hoping that Shauna would give up sometime soon, while the other part knew that she could actually face a new breaking point if she ever did.

When she got back to her bedroom, she had missed 7 calls. All from Shauna, she assumed. She didn't leave any voicemails, focusing this time on quantity instead of the message apparently. When Jackie refused to answer them, she apparently gave up for a while. The next day, Jackie was at her desk doing her homework when Shauna's voice played over her machine.

"I... I broke up with him, Jax." Jackie's head snapped at attention. Adam? She broke up with him? 'I couldn't do it. I couldn't explain why I was so miserable, I couldn't say it in any way he could understand. I'm completely alone now. I know I did it to myself, but I need you. I know you don't want to be friends, or that you can't be friends with me. I know part of you hates me, but I also know there's a part of you that never could. Or at least... I hope so. Maybe I don't need a friend... maybe I just need you. Whatever form you can take in my life Jackie, I don't care. I still need you. Please.' The line was quiet, but Jackie could tell that Shauna was still there. She hesitantly picked up the phone, without saying a word. Shauna sighed, "Jax? You there?"

Jackie knew how badly she wanted to talk to her, but she wasn't really sure what to say. She sat on the quiet line for a moment, listening to Shauna's breathing and trying to figure out how she felt about all this. Why the fuck would it have taken her so long to break up with him? "Please, baby." Jackie heard her little whine turn into a sob and was ready to forget everything, so she hung up the phone to stop herself from saying something she didn't want to.

She walked out of her bedroom and found Re about to leave for work. Jackie must've looked conflicted, because she stopped half way out the door.

"What?" she asked.

"Shauna broke up with him."

"Are you going up there?"

"What? No. That would be so desperate, Re. I told you, I can't keep doing this back and forth, and I don't even know if I can get over everything."

Renee walked up to Jackie and cupped her face, "Jack, I love you dearly, but you're being dumb. I'm late, so I'm gonna go. Meet me there?"

Jackie nodded, unsure of how to respond to that. Next, she called Van. As soon as she heard her pick up she blurted out, "They broke up."

"You talked to her?"

"No, no. She was leaving a voicemail and I guess I like picked up the phone but I didn't know what to say, so I hung up and didn't say anything."

"But you're going to talk to her?"

"I mean... I don't know. And say what? I've been saying that I'm done and I want nothing to do with her. Now the second she breaks up with her boyfriend I'm jumping back in? You don't think that's a bad plan?"

"Tai probably would, but I never thought you were gonna be able to never speak to the girl again, so..."

"I just can't get over her letting me do whatever I wanted to that girl in the bar so that she could hang out with her boyfriend. I would literally get violent I think if I saw her doing that shit. The only time it came close to it I dragged her away and fucked her in the bathroom immediately."

"I mean... it's not like she didn't get violent. She grabbed you by the throat." Jackie rolled her eyes. That was barely violent.

"You know what I mean."

"Don't you want to ask her why, though? I mean she's got to have an explanation of some kind."

"Maybe. I don't know."

“Jackie... I know you’re hurt and she fucked with you and I’m pissed about it too, but is this really what you wanted? This friendship thing with her?”

Jackie thought for a second. “No. It’s really not.”

“I didn’t think so.”

“So what do I do?”

“Go get her, Jax.”

Jackie got off the phone with Van and immediately dialed Shauna’s number. It didn’t even get a chance to ring before Shauna picked up and Jackie immediately asked, “You’re done?”

Shauna answered as fast as she’s ever answered. “We’re done, Jax.”

“I’m coming over.”

“Now—?” Shauna asked the question but Jackie hung up the phone before she could answer. It was like 9 pm on a Tuesday, but she didn’t care. She needed to be at Brown right now. She called and left a voicemail at work saying she was going to be gone for a few days... family emergency, and got on the next bus she could. By 3 am she was there. She marched up to Lottie’s door and knocked hard three times. The door swung open and Shauna was on the other side. Her hair was wet like she had just gotten out of the shower and she looked scared and unsure. They stood at the door in silence until Shauna’s eyes started to well up with tears. Jackie saw those sad big brown eyes and folded immediately.

“Just come here,” she said with a sigh, wrapping Shauna in a hug in the doorway. As soon as she said it Shauna started to cry.

“I’m so sorry. I’m so sorry, Jax.” Jackie held her and led them into the living room. They sat down on the couch and Jackie ran her hands through the girl’s hair as she sobbed, “I didn’t think I’d ever see you again.” Jackie could feel her hyperventilating and was truly concerned. Shauna NEVER did this. She had to have been really fucked up about the whole thing to have gotten to this point.

“I don’t think I could’ve ever stayed away.” Jackie smiled into the top of her head and kissed it. Shauna’s crying slowed down and she looked up at Jackie. She looked so sad, and it broke her heart. “Do you want to go sit down and talk?” Shauna nodded and they walked together to the bedroom. Shauna sat down on her bed and Jackie noticed that the shirt she had neglected to come back for was tangled in with her blankets on what had been Jackie’s side of the bed. Jackie sighed and sat down across from her. Shauna sniffled and picked at her sweatpants, trying not to cry.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t think I’d be such a mess. I just— I really didn’t think I was ever going to see you again.”

Jackie shook her head, “No, don’t apologize. I am a little bit worried though. I don’t think I’ve ever seen you this worked up,” Jackie sighed. ‘I’m sorry that I wasn’t here.’ Shauna shook her head but didn’t say anything so Jackie continued, “What happened with Adam? Did he do something? Is that what’s going on?” Obviously, Jackie wanted to think that the risk of losing her was the issue, but it wasn’t something that Shauna had never experienced before and the last time she barely even cried.

“No. I was the asshole, again.” Jackie looked at her, wanting to comfort her and just forget everything that had happened, but also needing an explanation. Did Adam break up with her and now Jackie was the second option? Did he hurt her? She needed to know. She reached out and placed her hand on Shauna’s thigh, causing the girl to look up and continue. ‘I’ve been... a bit of a mess since spring break, or the week after spring break, I guess. I actually haven’t really left the apartment since then.’ She looked back down at her lap, “I don’t want to seem like I’m trying to make you feel guilty. I promise it’s not your fault. It’s mine and I know that.”

“I won’t take it that way. Just talk to me.” Shauna nodded.

“When Lottie came back up from saying goodbye to you guys I asked him to leave, and then he’d call and I wouldn’t answer. He came by a few times and he kept asking what was wrong. He was honestly really sweet about it,” Shauna rolled her eyes and sighed, ‘It just became very clear how little he meant to me after that night.’ She looked up at Jackie and grabbed her hand. “I never should have left with him that night. I never should have entertained it that night. I should have just been with you. All I have ever wanted was to be with you, and I let you down when you took a chance on me.” Shauna took a deep breath, “All I have ever done is hurt you. Every time you choose to trust me I hurt you. I am just... so fucked up in the head.”

Jackie shook her head. “Why did you? Leave that night, entertained him?”

“I thought you were going to regret it and tell me that we broke the rules and it was a one time thing. I thought I was going to ruin it with him and not have a real chance with you and end up completely alone while you have the time of your life with Charlie or whoever. Then it was clear that you were pissed off and I should have just fixed it but I got defensive. I always get so fucking defensive. I saw you with that girl and I just wanted to fucking kill her. I got so drunk so fast and then when I tried to kiss you you pushed me away. I get why you did it. Believe me, I know I was being a dick. I just felt so rejected and I knew you didn’t actually want me to leave with him, but I was just trying to hurt you. I lashed out and it was fucked up. I’m really sorry, Jackie.” Jackie nodded, not really sure what to say.

“Charlie and I haven’t been anything to each other in over a month. We don’t talk anymore. I haven’t really spoken to anyone but Re or Van since that morning. I’ve been kind of holed up in my room.”

“I really didn’t expect you to be so hurt. I thought it was going to just be like any other fight, but then a week went by and you weren’t answering or returning my calls, Lottie had tried to call and apparently you weren’t there to answer. I spiraled. I really did. Adam could’ve dropped dead at the foot of my bed and I don’t think I would’ve noticed. He came in yesterday trying to get me out of bed and I just yelled at him. I told him I didn’t care about him and that all he was was a nuisance. I was really awful.” Shauna shook her head, ashamed.

“Why didn’t you tell him about me?” Jackie’s eyes welled up and she choked on her words, “Was Jeff really more significant to you than I was?” A tear rolled down her cheek and Shauna looked up at her, horrified and hurried to wipe it away.

“God, no. I’m so sorry I didn’t realize you actually thought that.” She looked appalled by the suggestion. Shauna thought for a second. “This is going to make me sound horrible.”

“I don’t think you’re horrible, Shauna. I’m just trying to understand.”

“If we were dating and he knew about you... like everything about you, it would be fair for him to set boundaries. He’d be uncomfortable with sleepovers and maybe pay enough attention to realize how fucking bad I wanted you. I couldn’t risk it. I probably shouldn’t have been with him at all, he just... wanted me, I guess.”

In some sick way the thought of Shauna not mentioning Jackie to keep her options open in case she wanted to cheat on her boyfriend with her was kind of comforting. “The problem was never how badly I wanted you.”

“I think I know that... but my head doesn’t think that way.”

Jackie held her face in her hand. Her skin was soft and warm, and she almost lost herself in the girl’s eyes. “I have spent my whole life wanting you, Shauna Shipman.” She had to have known that. She had to have, right?

“Really?” she asked, and she looked so vulnerable. She looked like anything Jackie said right now would have been nothing but fact. She would take it and believe it completely.

“Since like second grade. Seriously.” Shauna looked down at Jackie’s lips like she needed them but she was terrified to be turned away again. Jackie leaned in and gave her what she knew they both wanted. She kissed her gently, trying to heal all the hurt she had felt all at once. When Jackie pulled away, she saw a tear running down her face.

“I didn’t ruin it?”

“No, baby.” Jackie shook her head and smiled, “Just... No more boyfriends okay? Or girlfriends. Just me, yeah?”

Shauna smiled at her and nodded her head. She leaned in and kissed her again, smiling through it. “Thank you for coming back, Jax.” Jackie nodded and they laid down together, Shauna’s head resting on Jackie’s chest. Jackie sighed and ran her fingers through the girl’s hair.

“Does this mean I can have my shirt back?” Jackie asked, “Or do you need it still?” Shauna laughed and smacked her leg.

“Don’t make fun of me. I was depressed. You can have it back but I’ve cried into it for the past 3 weeks so...”

Jackie laughed back. “It’s yours. Probably looks better on you anyway.” They sat in silence for a while, neither of them wanting to waste any time asleep.

“I have class with that girl you went home with.” Her voice was hard now, no more softness or vulnerability. Jackie looked down but couldn’t see her face.

“Seriously? I’m so sorry, I didn’t know. I honestly have been calling her notShauna to Van and Re this whole time.” Shauna turned her head to look back at Jackie.

She sighed, “I’m never going back to class.”

“You have to go to class, Shipman come on. You were smart enough to get into Brown and ditch me for the ivies, you can’t throw it away now. If it helps at all the sex was fucking

awful.”

Shauna’s jaw dropped and she laughed in shock, “Wow, Jax. You’ve got jokes today, huh?”

Jackie shrugged and smiled at her. She dropped her smile a bit and replaced the look with something more flirty, “Did he make you cum?”

Shauna raised her eyebrows. “That’s none of your business...” Shauna looked away, “But no. He did not.”

Jackie smiled, “You must not have prayed hard enough, huh?” She rolled her eyes and smacked Jackie playfully in the stomach.

“Oh you thought you were so funny with that one didn’t you?”

“Admit it, a very very small part of you wanted to laugh.”

Shauna tried to save face, but she cracked after a few seconds and laughed, “No comment.”

Jackie grinned at her. “So...,” Jackie couldn’t even deliver the rest of the line. She was going to suggest she give it her best shot, but Shauna was on her within seconds. It was like Jackie blinked and the girl had her pressed against the mattress, kissing her like she couldn’t get enough of her. “Guessing that’s a yes?”

“Oh, shut up.” Shauna kissed her again and Jackie’s hands tore at the girl’s shirt. As soon as it was off Jackie buried herself in her tits. She bit and sucked on them, leaving marks everywhere she went. Shauna was hers. Her tits were hers, her neck was hers. Everything was Jackie’s and she intended to let everybody know it. She had Shauna moaning and heavy breathing before even taking her pants off and she knew how badly they both needed this. Jackie was trying to stay focused on getting the girl’s pants off, but Shauna’s knee was grinding hard into her clit. She was grinning at her, licking up her jawline and moaning into her ear. Jackie couldn’t focus and she didn’t think her body would let her move even if she wanted to. Shauna’s tits were bouncing in her face and that view alone probably would’ve been enough to get her off, but on top of it Shauna was fucking talking to her too.

“Do you like what you see, baby?” Jackie’s eyes rolled back in her head and she came in her jeans. Shauna smiled, “I’m gonna take that as a yes.”

Jackie tackled her and ripped her sweatpants off of her. She dove into Shauna’s pussy face first and moaned at the familiar taste and smell of it. She wanted more. She wanted all of her so fucking badly. She dipped her tongue inside her and worked from her opening to her clit, sucking and running her tongue in circles on it at the same time. Shauna’s hands were tangled in Jackie’s hair and she was pulling hard enough on it to hurt, which only motivated her more. As soon as she was about to cum, Jackie pulled away. Shauna’s head shot up, confused and frustrated.

“What? What?” Shauna asked.

“Is that what it was like... with Adam?” Jackie grinned as she said it and Shauna rolled her eyes, grinning back before grabbing Jackie by the hair and pushing her back down. Jackie moaned at the force of it and let her tongue explore every inch of it. She felt like she needed

to consume every part of Shauna that was able to be consumed, no matter how long it took or how tired she was. She pressed two fingers into Shauna's pussy and started to fuck her slow and deep, something that Shauna was very unprepared for. She screamed and Jackie slapped her hand over the girl's mouth as she rode out her orgasm. She ground her hips hard into Jackie's face and Jackie happily lapped up anything that Shauna would give her. Before Shauna had even regained her breath, she dragged Jackie up to her by her hair and bit down on her bottom lip. Jackie attacked her with the same intensity as Shauna's hands pulled hard at Jackie's shorts.

Jackie had really missed the feeling of Shauna's hands and her arms. Shauna pushed her fingers hard and fast into Jackie. She pumped in and out like she was on a mission, lips glued to Jackie's neck. Jackie moaned and her head shot off the bed. She grabbed Shauna's back and held her close, looking at her now healed skin on her back. She traced her fingers on her back between moans, "I miss the way those scratches looked on your back... so sexy, baby." Shauna fucked her harder and Jackie clamped down on her back, watching her muscles contract with every movement.

"Leave them again, then." Jackie bit down hard on Shauna's shoulder to keep herself quiet at the invitation and as she came she tore down Shauna's back with both hands. Shauna moaned with her and Jackie sat up, pushing Shauna gently back into the bed. She straddled Shauna's stomach, slowly making her way up to the girl's swollen lips. Shauna apparently wasn't a fan of the teasing though, and as soon as she saw where it was going she cupped Jackie's ass and practically threw her up to meet her face. Shauna's arms wrapped around Jackie's thighs, the pads of her fingers applying so much pressure it hurt. Jackie started to buck her hips with the rhythm that Shauna had set and she gripped hard at the headboard. She knew the sound of it banging against the wall was probably pretty disruptive at 5 am, but it felt so good and Shauna didn't seem to be slowing down.

"Fuck, Shauna. Touch yourself. Please. I want to cum with you." The feeling of Shauna's moan into her pussy almost sent her over the edge but Jackie gripped her face a little harder with her thighs and took a deep breath to compose herself. She felt one of Shauna's hands come off of her thigh and then seconds later, could feel Shauna's arm moving. She wished she could watch. She wanted to see Shauna's fingers moving in and out of her. She thought about turning around, but Shauna started to moan again. She rocked her hips back and forth, putting Shauna's tongue in all the right places. Shauna's moans were getting breathier and instead of having one hand on her thigh, she wrapped her forearm underneath Jackie's ass, pulling her down hard onto her face. Jackie tried not to scream at the added pressure, but when Shauna started sucking hard on her clit she couldn't help herself. She came hard on Shauna's face and felt the girl shaking beneath her. Shauna's moans were enough to send Jackie into a second orgasm before she climbed off of Shauna and collapsed in her bed.

"I fucking love it when you do that," Shauna said as she caught her breath.

"Turn around, I want to see your back," Jackie demanded. Shauna grinned and turned over on her stomach. Jackie suppressed a moan.

"Fuck, baby you look so good." Shauna moaned softly. There was a light bite mark on her shoulder, four lines dug into her back, one of which had broken skin. It was bleeding, but not much. Just enough to remind Jackie of Shauna licking the blood off of her lip. She let her

hands trace over the marks, practically salivating at the way they looked on her muscles. “Flex.”

“What?” Shauna turned her head to try to figure out what Jackie was asking of her.

“Your back. Please?” Shauna laughed and Jackie watched as her shoulder blades pressed together, accentuating the thick muscles underneath her bright red skin near her spine. She pulled her arms apart slightly and Jackie watched the muscles tighten and stretch. “Fuck.”

“I haven’t been to the gym in weeks. You’re losing it.”

“You look fucking beautiful Shauna Shipman,” Jackie watched her smile softly. Jackie tucked her hands underneath the girl’s body, grabbing her tits as she kissed down the marks she had left. “I really fucking missed you,” Jackie said softly against her skin.

“You have no fucking idea.” Jackie smiled and toppled over next to her. She ran her fingers over the damaged skin until they both eventually fell asleep.

Chapter 48

The next morning, Jackie woke up to Shauna's door creaking open.

"Shauna. Wake up I brought fo— Oh fuck, Jackie?!" Nat slammed the door shut and Jackie laughed, making sure she was covered enough for what was coming next. She looked over at Shauna and smiled awkwardly.

"Here we go," she said with a chuckle.

Jackie heard a cackle on the other side of the door that she knew belonged to Lottie before it swung wide open.

"Jackie! I didn't know you were coming!" Lottie ran and jumped into Shauna's bed, apparently unconcerned by their very obvious nudity.

"Glad we didn't wake you," Shauna said. Jackie smacked her shoulder.

"Neither did I, really. I got in at like 3 this morning."

"Natty, baby don't be a wuss. They're covered," Lot said into the hallway. Jackie heard the girl sigh as she made her way back in. Lottie continued, 'So... this?' Lottie pointed between the two of them and wiggled her eyebrows. "Are we back?"

Jackie smiled at her, unable to contain her excitement. "We are very back."

Shauna decided that skipping one more day of class wouldn't hurt anybody and the two of them walked around campus. Shauna showed her the library, the private literature department library, and the coffee shop that she frequented. They were so excited they might as well have been skipping across campus. The next day, Jackie tore herself away from Brown and headed back to Rutgers. She told Renee, who insisted they celebrate at the bar. Even Tai seemed happy about it, only offering a few warnings about not letting her pull any stupid shit before congratulating her. That summer, Jackie and Shauna sat Ms. Shipman down and told her that they were together. She had already known that there was something going on and had nothing bad to say, not that they expected her to. She insisted Jackie move in with them and from that day until graduation, they operated like their own little family unit.

Jackie waited until she graduated to talk to her parents about it. She honestly didn't expect them to care, considering they had seen her maybe twice in those four college years, but she was wrong. It was a good thing she waited until she finished her degree and got it completely paid for, because they cut her off entirely. She thought she would be more upset about it, but she just wasn't. She had stopped caring about what her parents thought of her a long time ago. After graduation, Nat, Lottie, Renee, Shauna and her all moved to join Tai and Van in NYC, which happened to be a hub for everything they all wanted to do. It was a state capitol, so Tai would have access to the state level courthouse, it was a hot spot for all artforms from movies and music to literature, there were bars on every corner, therapy and social services offices on every block, and the entire city was an advertisement. Nat ended up buying her own bar and Shauna writing her own book, Lottie developed a program for young teens with mental issues

to find healthy alternative outlets and therapy, and Van restored an old theater that prided itself on playing the classics, which apparently appealed to every film snob in the city. Renee found a long term partner, and continued to chip away at her novel that was a long time coming. They were happy, and as the years went on, their group became nothing but closer. They spent every holiday, every birthday and every other milestone together and they promised to never stop prioritizing each other. They were happy to enter adulthood together, as one big family.